

Jim Fisher Worship Leader

Marta Rieman, Worship Associate

Welcome and Announcements

Jana Robinson, Board Member

Centering Thought

Jim Fisher

A House of Cards - Margaret Fisher 1993

Though I have wealth and worldly goods,
if I ignore the plight of those in poverty,
I am myself impoverished.

**For if I close my eyes to homelessness,
to nakedness and hunger,
to illness and to suffering,
My wealth is then diminished. It is meaningless.**

Though I have education, knowledge, and acuity,
if I neglect the plight of ignorance
and mental disability,
My own potential is not realized.

**For if I fail to use the benefits
of education for those whose lives
are threatened with destruction,
Then I myself shall live in ignorance.**

Though I enjoy acceptance in society,
if I ignore the lonely and the insecure,
my own security is tenuous.

**For if I am insensitive to fear,
to prejudice and isolation,
to suffering and humiliation,
Then I have built myself a house of cards
with poverty of body, mind, and soul.**

Prelude

Imagine

Paul Kelly

Call to Worship

Jim Fisher

Come, Join in Our Circle Words by Lindsay Harmon 1996

Come you into the circle of light and of love.
Welcome to the circle of myth and of meaning.
Bring to the circle your wit and your wisdom.
Join in reflection and in celebration.
The world, the stars, and deep space are ours.
And we are a part of it all.

We are but a second in the eons of time
But ours is all time; we are part of eternity.
The microbes are in us and of us; to us they bequeathed
The genes that gave them first life.
The ceaseless ebbing and flowing of life.
Sifted and sorted, sorted and winnowed,
Combined and discarded, and brought forth new forms.
We inheritors celebrate, contemplate, worship.

We join in our wonder, our song, and our story.
We are one with all life and all being.
Yet each is unique as we join in our worship.

Our moment, alone and together, is all that we have.
Let us rejoice that we have it — together.
Shalom

Opening Hymn

#1020 Woyaya
(Lyrics will be on the monitor)

Paul Kelly

I want you to join me on a journey this morning. We are searching for the Humanist soul.
Woyaya is a word in the Ghanaian Ga language that translate as “We are going”.

Lotus Candle & Chalice Lighting

Invoking Thoreau by Ben Soule

Marta Rieman

Affirmation of Covenant

Marta Rieman

Time for All Ages

Jim Fisher

I am a “crib Unitarian Universalist”. I struggled through about 12 years of religious education knowing my un-churched friends were playing in the woods or watching Sunday morning cartoons on black and white TVs. My salvation, as it was, was a brilliant couple, Lindsay and Elloise Harmon who took my little cohort under their wings for many of those 12 years. They were scientists and brought science into our study of religion. It was magical. Lindsay lived well into his 90s and continued to write to the end. I am drawing from three of his books here today. [Marta will play the part of Coyote]

“The Coyote and the Mouse” by Lindsay Harmon The Wit and Wisdom of Lindsay Harmon

As I became aware of Coyote, sitting there in my bedroom. He was holding a little brown mouse in his mouth. He had it by the tail and it was just dangling, scared stiff, its legs outspread in terror, obviously alive but not moving. Whatever are you doing with that mouse, Coyote? I asked.



He put the mouse down on the floor and put his paw on it, lightly, just enough so that it couldn't run away. Then he spoke.

Just trying to show you something you need to know about.

That's a fine way to go about it! You're torturing that mouse! Scaring it to Death!

Don't worry. It'll live. I just thought you should be more aware.

Aware? Aware of mice in my house? I don't get it. If you don't get it, you don't get it. Here, I'll let it go.

He took his paw off of the mouse. It just stayed there, obviously paralyzed by fear. Its little beady eyes looked all about but otherwise didn't move. Obviously, Coyote was trying to tell me something, but what? As I kept staring at the mouse, it seemed as if I was looking into a mirror. Gradually the light dawned. Coyote smiled and walked away. The mouse turned his head and looked all about, then darted away. But I knew he would come back. In fact, I recalled seeing him before, just a quiet little streak across the floor and then out of sight. I promised myself that I would be more aware in the future. Maybe if I were to offer it a bit of cheese it would come out where I could see it, without Coyote having to bring it to me. I suspected that it might have a lot to tell me, if only I could engage it more directly.

After a time, the mouse reappeared, as Coyote had done many times. It was as if Coyote had assumed the mouse identity.

Don't you get it yet? he asked.

Maybe I do. You're Coyote, holding the mirror up to me. Sure, I'm a mouse sometimes, almost afraid of my shadow. So what?

You've got it! Now work on it. You don't have to be a mouse all the time. It's up to you, you know. You could even try being a Coyote.

I'll have to think about that one.

Thanks, Coyote. You can go now. And he did.

Offering

Marta Rieman

Offering Music

Beethoven

Paul Kelly

Joys and Sorrows

Marta Rieman

Pastoral Prayer <https://www.reddit.com/r/humanism/>

Jim Fisher

May all beings have fresh clean water to drink.
May all beings have food to eat.
May all beings have a home.
May all beings have someone to share love with.
May all beings have their true purpose.
May all beings be well and happy.
May all beings be free from suffering.
Today, I shall do what I can to make this so.

Reading

E.M. Forster, This I Believe

Jim Fisher

He is best known for his novels, particularly *A Room with a View* (1908), *Howards End* (1910) and *A Passage to India* (1924).

E.M. Forster What I Believe Hogarth Sixpenny Pamphlets Number One London 1939

"I DO not believe in Belief. But this is an age of faith, and there are so many militant creeds that, in self-defense, one has to formulate a creed of one's own. Tolerance, good temper and sympathy are no longer enough in a world which is rent by religious and racial persecution, in a world where ignorance rules, and science, who ought to have ruled, plays the subservient pimp.

Tolerance, good temper and sympathy—they are what matter really, and if the human race is not to collapse they must come to the front before long. But for the moment they are not enough, their action is no stronger than a flower, battered beneath a military jack-boot. They want stiffening, even if the process coarsens them. Faith, to my mind, is a stiffening process, a sort of mental starch, which ought to be applied as sparingly as possible. I dislike the stuff. I do not believe in it, for its own sake, at all. Herein I probably differ from most people, who believe in Belief, and are only sorry they cannot swallow even more than they do. My law givers are Erasmus and Montaigne, not Moses and St. Paul. My temple stands not upon Mount Moriah but in' that Elysian Field where even the immoral are admitted. My motto is: " Lord, I disbelieve— help thou my unbelief."

Lindsay Harmon "Soul Yet" in Coyote Talks about Humanism 1995

“So, we left some business unfinished, didn’t we, Coyote? Holy smoke! And soul, and spirits, and who knows what else, and with Halloween just around the corner! So you’re asking for definitions again? Can’t you be satisfied with Webster?”

That’s just the point. It’s been rumored that coyotes are a bit dyslexic. And anyway, what do you do when there are a number of different definitions? It’s quite your definitions I’m interested in. Don’t you have trouble making up your mind about these terms you use so readily?

Good point, coyote. Only I don’t do it “so readily.” I try to be careful, to minimize possible misunderstandings. I’m not so sure everybody does. At the Spokane General Assembly, John Buehrens bellowed out “Soul! Soul! Soul!”--and I’m not at all sure his meaning was clear to his hearers. Maybe not to himself either--I don’t know. I was a bit bothered by that. His emotional meaning was clear, but his cognitive meaning was not. That leaves quite a number of UU’s puzzled, particularly that large majority who call themselves “Humanists.”

What are those Humanists so worried about? Don’t they believe in diversity? Isn’t it OK if different people have different ideas? What’s the big deal?

Two points: Diversity is fine; muddled meanings are not. What if you don’t even know that your meaning diverges from mine? What if I think you mean one thing, and you are thinking I mean something quite different? Tolerance of misunderstandings doesn’t make for harmonious relations. Acceptance of diversity does. Recognizing the difference is important.

OK. But you haven’t said what you mean by “soul.” Do animals have souls? Is the soul something that lives, goes on after the body has died, perhaps to inhabit another body, as the doctrine of reincarnation would have it? Can you make this one thing perfectly clear?

OK, Tricky Dick, I’ll try. Soul to me is, on a cognitive level, essentially equivalent to “self,” but it has a different feeling tone. When I said, in one of our previous conversations, something about “growing a soul,” I meant developing a lively, confident, deep-seated sense of self. I meant developing a personal security that assures that I don’t have to dominate somebody else in order for me to feel important. Internal security, a calmness and acceptance of myself and the world, a sense of “being an individual,” and still an integral part of that great interdependent web we talk about. In her beautiful version of “Amazing Grace” Gretchen Woods sings, “It makes me feel a part of all, and still uniquely me.” She emphasizes the importance of the feeling side of life, without sacrificing cognitive clarity.

Ok-aa-ay...I guess I can go with that. But isn’t there still some ambiguity? Don’t some people need undiluted clarity? They need to have something mean simply this, and not that. How do you deal with this need?

I try to deal with it tolerantly. I know some people need sharp distinctions. They need to be sure about things. But I believe there are some things that we simply can't be sure about on the basis of naturalistic evidence. That's why I call myself an agnostic. I try to develop a tolerance of ambiguity, to be satisfied with a certain degree of uncertainty. An open mind has its merits. I don't have a need to be perfectly clear about everything, and to deny that for which I have no evidence, especially if I believe it is really impossible to have evidence. I know some people would call that wishy-washy. They want, even need, clear, unambiguous pro's and con's. People vary in their tolerance for ambiguity, and that's OK. I feel that as I learn more, my tolerance of ambiguity increases. There is so much we can't be sure about--so why choose up sides? Argument to clarify meaning is fine, but please don't try to tell me I'm wrong if I simply disagree with your sense of certainty, and believe that sometimes evidence is impossible to come by.

Far be it from me to tell you what to believe. I need to give this more thought.

And then, for once, coyote was lost in thought, and simply got lost. But I'll find him again.

So end the readings.

<u><i>Meditative Hymn</i></u>	Ours is a Simple Faith	Paul Kelly
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<u><i>Sermon</i></u>	Humanist Soul Matters	Jim Fisher
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The Humanist Soul Matters

Our search to give our lives meaning and a lasting legacy raises questions beyond the realm of science. Where do humanists turn in matters of the soul?

I was asked in June whether I could fill in a gap week in July and August. My first question, typically, is "What's the theme in "Soul Matters". I thus learned that there is no publication in July nor August. I find there are different ways to express this.

- 1) Soul Matters is on holiday this summer.
- 2) Soul Matters, but not this summer.
- 3) Soul does not Matter in the summer.
- 4) Souls may contain matter ten months of the year, but not in July and August!

I was quick to respond, "what better time for a humanist to take the helm just when soul does not matter. This is like Jewish staffing restaurants on Christmas day or revelers failing to notice that Mardi Gras has ended and lent started two days earlier.

What is this thing we call soul? How is it entwined with other religious epistemology (great word epistemology, easy for you to say.) I want to consider weighty matters this morning, the very essence of spirituality and religion, applying to them cultural theories of knowledge.

My search for my lost soul began at www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com. I had not previously visited this site, though I think many of you may have. The Soul Matters team is made up of ten people (like the months), four of whom are UU ministers. They are experts in education, music, youth ministries, diversity, equity and inclusion.. Their mission is to produce a wide range of materials to support and synchronize UU services and religious education. Rev. Scott Tayler is the Founder of Soul Matters. Rev. Scott writes, "What began as a handful of seminary buddies supporting each other has organically become a means for deep congregational interdependence. ... Soul Matters is about healing spiritual disconnection. It mends the divides between and within congregations. It is grace in action and the interdependent web becomes real. What a privilege to be a part of that!" Soul Matters Sharing Circle sustains itself through the sale of curriculum as well as consulting. You may want to try their free samples online.

I did not find a definition of soul on this website, though they offer tools that I think will serve us in our quest:

One is the idea of **synchronicity**. We are a covenantal religion. We are learning to get along, as it were, to live together in peace and seek the truth in love. We are also a very small religion swimming in a large and expanding universe. A modicum of coordination, synchronizing our thoughts and prayers may resonate in subtle ways beyond the walls of this church. I recall, as some of you may recall, the 1970s expansion of Transcendental Meditation or TM. The free, introductory lectures posited that any society that could reach 10% saturation of TM would see dramatic reductions in crime, domestic violence and other instances of social problems. The statistics were questionable, but the new age never looked back and the notion that if enough of us vibrate in the same frequency at the same time, then the beneficial effects will be greater than the sum of our hearts.

Another tool for our journey is **creativity**. Soul Matters has a spin-off called Creativity Matters. We desire to be creative in music, dance, art, cooking, gardening, writing, conversation, blogging, humor you name it. Creativity may be a part of our spiritual journey, and intensely personal and private endeavor. We may guard our journal with lock and key, hoping that no one ever reads it. Some of us may want to wave our creativity like a flag, look at me, look at me. We may revel in applause, or even in the lack of applause as this will help us refine our skills. Still others may find their great creative niche to be in big collaborative efforts, third clarinet in a town band or, as a great theatrical director Bill Raiten once said, to take great pride in being the sixth spear bearer in the chorus of a community theater. Our group creativity may take us outdoors, building nature trails or as our beloved Bill Clark, being part of a team that interprets nature for visitors to our parks and lands. All of this is soulful, though I am still far from understanding the essence of soul.

Plato's Eternal Soul

Many of you are scholars, and that humbles me. You will know that the term soul was defined, or perhaps dissected by Plato around 400 BC. The Platonic soul consists of three parts, which are located in different regions of the body:

1. The *Logos* located in the head, is related to reason and regulates the other parts.
2. The *thymos* located near the chest region, is related to spirit.
3. The *eros* located in the stomach, is related to one's desires or appetite.

One cannot help but see a connection with Freud's SuperEgo, Ego and Id, as well as the Hindu taxonomy of varnas, but we'll save that for another day. Plato's concept of soul is tied up with the times, those being 400 BC in Greece. Plato's soul was not corporeal, and Plato surmised that the soul might never die, but would be reincarnated into different bodies. Virtuous living moves the soul up the social ladder while wrong living leads it down. Hinduism and Buddhism share similar constructs, bound up as they are in very different cultural settings.

[The non-corporeal soul, spirits reborn in new bodies, reincarnation, are all uncomfortable territory for humanists, who aspire to be scientific, to formulate hypotheses that can be falsified if not proven, to subject these ideas to rigorous testing and to judge whether the evidence negates the hypothesis. The hypothesis of the non-corporeal soul finding a new body has eluded testing, though the internet is full of claims that this has been done.]

Wordsworth's 1807 poem, "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood.", also called the "Ode" captures Plato's notion of the immortal soul. Here are some very short excerpts:

There was a time when meadow, grave, and stream,
The earth and every common sight,
To me did seem
Appareled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:

Common Soul

I did not mean to go down this rabbit hole. The question of what happens to our individual soul after we die is interesting. It is even a test of faith for many religions. The debate as to whether our souls are reincarnated is beside the point. It is not the "sleep and a forgetting", but the remembering that is our soul's legacy. It is the contribution that we have made in our works that is our legacy. Our collective soul is remembered, transmitted and refined across generations.

Our righteous actions may live on in this world as may our transgressions. We may not live long-enough to know the full consequences, but our children may.

We can pick up a few more tools for our quest.

1. **Integration:** Our soul may not be one thing or located in one place in our bodies. Our soul may be the way we mediate our reason, our spirit and our desires. It may be a process.
2. **Interdependence:** Our society is built upon all of our souls. The repression of the mind, spirit or desires of people in our society not only diminishes the expression of their souls, but also our own.

Times of Crisis

Our nation is in for a very bumpy ride to the November 5 election, and I fear we will not have a clear resolution following the election. The very essence of this American soul appears to be in question. I have lived long enough to recognize that dire as our current political situation may seem, it is not our first nor will it be our last existential crisis in this hurley-burley social-political landscape.

In searching for the lost humanist soul, I will turn to another period of existential crisis, a time when the world saw the rise of racists, antisemitic, anti-immigrant sentiment, professed cultural superiority and rationalization for strong-armed leadership. Adolph Hitler took the title of Leader and Reich Chancellor in 1934. Benito Mussolini gained control of Italy, Francisco Franco gained and held authoritarian leadership of Spain. India was moving toward independence from Great Britain and a violent partition based on religious belief.

My first reading -- E.M. Forster What I Believe -- was written in 1939 in the midst of that ere of intolerance and persecution.

“I DO not believe in Belief. But this is an age of faith, and there are so many militant creeds that, in self-defense, one has to formulate a creed of one's own. Tolerance, good temper and sympathy are no longer enough in a world which is rent by religious and racial persecution”

Forster, faced social stigma for his homosexuality, and argued for legalization successfully just three years before his death. Forster said, "The humanist has four leading characteristics –

- curiosity,
- a free mind,
- belief in good taste, and
- belief in the human race.

We can add these to our tools on this quest.

Spirituality, Religion and the Soul

I know my time is up, that is unless there were no joys and sorrows today. One never knows!

Humanists writers are passionate about their interpretation of spirituality. This would, and perhaps will be the material for another Sunday. The spiritual experience of nature and art, the inner spiritual experience of discovery and learning and even the religious experience of oneness or togetherness.

I spent four years directing research at Wright State University on treatment for drug abuse. We very often heard from our patients, "I believe in spirituality, but I am not religious." Understand that many, perhaps most of our patients had burned a lot of bridges. Their drug use left them alienated from family, unemployed, incarcerated, physically and mentally ill. Society had stigmatized them.

My thought at the time and now is that I believe in religion, but am not a spiritual person. I like to perform in large community bands and orchestras. I like to be among my fellow Unitarian Universalist parishioners. I am deeply rewarded when I volunteer with you good people clearing brush in the outdoor sanctuary or making eggrolls at the Common Ground Fair. You cannot imagine the joy, drama, passion and soulful experience of making eggrolls at the Common Ground Fair!

Renowned sociologist Amatai Etzioni spoke at the same UU Assembly where John Buerhans proclaimed, Soul, Soul, Soul!. Etzioni was a passionate "Communitarian". It isn't for everyone, but in my world religion and soul are a communitarian experience. My mind, heart and stomach are thus fulfilled.

This is a longer conversation. May it be so.

Introduction to the closing hymn

The communal soul over the past 75 years is very often associated with African American culture. Soul food, soul music. "Soul of a Nation", soul power, are all references to a social movement celebrating African-Americanism. Unitarians Universalists can't claim that mantle, but we shall celebrate it. Please stand as you are able and join in singing Harry Belafonte's "Turn the World Around".

Closing Hymn
Kelly

#1074 Turn the World Around

Paul
(Lyrics will be on the monitor)

Benediction

Jim Fisher

“The Complaint of the Agnostic” by Lindsay Harmon Ink’lings 10/10/88

By the nature of things, what I cannot know
I can neither affirm nor deny.
For I can’t prove to you that it’s false or it’s true
However hard I try.

There may be a God, or a spirit world,
or a Heaven that we can’t perceive.
But I cannot know, and you cannot know
And that leaves us both free to believe.

So I can imagine, and you can imagine
And hold to quite different beliefs.
But for you and for me it must never be
That we dictate, to each other’s griefs.

I accept the “unknowable,” knowing meanwhile
That tomorrow it may become known.
Like X-rays and mesons and radio waves
That our ancestors could not have known.

So I accept you, who believe not as I do,
For you’re real, whatever your creed.
And if you accept me, though wrong I may be,
We’ll make the world better, indeed.

Postlude

Paul Kelly