
how the choices we make affect our lives and the lives of others
how truth and meaning relates to perspective and point of view
how the right of conscience calls us to do what is right
how our faith can help us understand our questions, seek answers,
and deal with the trials of life



Popcorn Theology

written by Michelle Richards

Exploring issues of theology and ethics through film
with Unitarian Universalist youth

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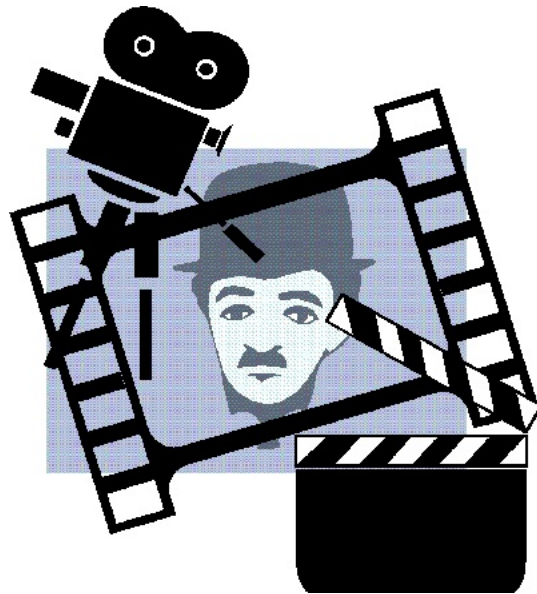
About the Author

Michelle Richards is a credentialed religious educator and the author of *Come Into the Circle: Worshiping with Children* (published by Skinner House in 2007) as well as co-author of the curriculum, *Compass Points*. She serves the Central Midwest District as a small church RE program consultant and *Covenanting for RE Excellence* Facilitator.

Michelle served for seven years as Director of Religious Education for the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Elkhart where *Popcorn Theology* emerged to meet the needs of the diverse middle school and high school age youth who attended over the years. Their interests and input shaped the creation of this curriculum and the choice of feature films which eventually made it into this final version.

Prior to becoming a religious educator, Michelle worked as a writer and television producer for several local public television stations. During this time she wrote and produced six documentaries dealing with children and educational issues. She has a bachelor's degree in Radio/Television/Film from Indiana State University with a specialization in writing and film criticism.

Michelle has been married to husband Bryan for 17 years and together they have two children, Carson (age 5) and Shannon (age 12).



About the Curriculum

Goals and Aspirations

Today's youth have grown up in a world of cable and satellite television offering hundreds of channels for viewing at any given moment. As visual resolution for computer games has increased over the years, our youth have also used their visual minds to solve complex problems and achieve predetermined goals. Recent improvements in video distribution via the internet have only increased our youth's desire to learn through visual medium.

Popcorn Theology takes this interest in learning through the visual arts and channels it into specific learning opportunities which examine issues of theological and ethical importance to our world. By using this visual medium to explore relevant issues, this curriculum seeks to help participants:

- examine how the choices we make affect our lives and the lives of others
- explore how concepts such as truth and meaning are related to perspective and point of view
- understand ways in which the right of conscience calls us to do what is right despite possible negative consequences
- consider ways in which our faith can help us understand our questions, seek answers, and deal with the trials of life
- learn about other faith traditions and their responses to important theological and ethical issues

Audiences for Popcorn Theology

This curriculum was created for middle school age youth at Unitarian Universalist congregations, but may also be used by high school age youth and adults. Because it was created for middle school youth specifically, all the movies selected are rated either PG or PG-13.

Popcorn Theology will accommodate very small youth programs with only three or four participants up to large programs with twenty or more participants.

Using Popcorn Theology

Due to the time constraints of most religious education programs, this curriculum has been designed to show only an excerpt of the movies featured in each session. The excerpt has been chosen specifically to highlight the values and learning experiences of the session for which it was chosen.

However, if the option of extending the session time is available, then *Popcorn Theology* may easily be adapted so that the entire movie can be shown at one time. To show the entire movie instead of just an excerpt, simply omit the introduction to the video (which serves to place the excerpt in context). Session leaders can also find additional ideas for discussion and more activities at the end of each session plan for those programs with more time available.

It is not recommended that you attempt to show the whole movie by splitting the session over multiple weeks. Attendance of youth may vary considerably from week to week and some youth would invariably miss either part of the movie – or miss the movie altogether but be present for only the related activities. This lack of continuity will short change the youth and the learning experiences they might have gained through this curriculum.

Following the Script

Each session of *Popcorn Theology* is structured around a film which raises issues of theological or ethical relevance to youth. This theme is carried through the entire session with additional activities, some of which require action and/or exploring the relevance to us as Unitarian Universalists.

Entering Activity

Popcorn Theology begins each session with an entering activity designed to engage youth in the subject matter as they arrive. Since the whole group rarely arrives all at once, the entering activity is designed to engage participants as they enter the physical space. As participants arrive, they are given a challenge or an opportunity to explore the day's theme through an introductory activity.

After all the participants have arrived and had a chance to browse the materials or engage in the entering activity, then some reflection is invited on the experience.

Premiere

This is when the video is first introduced and shown to the participants, either as an excerpt or in its entirety. A detailed introduction is provided here with the goal of placing the excerpt in context of the larger work (as a result, it may not be necessary to provide a lengthy introduction if you will be watching the entire film).

Leaders are invited to encourage any participants who may have seen the movie previously to introduce it for the group, but leaders should be aware that they may need to add any relevant details omitted so that proper context is provided.

A synopsis of the excerpted scenes follows the introduction so the session leader understands what material is covered in the excerpt. Then, if the group will not be watching the whole movie, details of when to pause the video are provided.

Reflection is invited first with general impressions of the movie or excerpt, then with specific questions designed to spur discussion on

the topic of the day's session. If your group will be using this curriculum as an extended session, discussion can continue for a longer time, and additional discussion questions (from the section after the conclusion of the general session plan) can be included.

Rising Action

In the movie industry, the term "rising action" is used to describe the series of events that lead to the climax of the story – often involving the conflicts or struggles of the protagonist. In this curriculum, the Rising Action section involves an activity designed to take any insights gained from the visual learning experience and process it in an active or physical way.

Whether it is an obstacle course, creating a mural or a ritual burning of barriers to happiness, the Rising Action section is when the learning moves from a passive absorption experience to an active kinetic experience.

After the activity in this part of the session, reflection is invited once again, encouraging participants to share what they've learned and any insights they've experienced.

Plot Point

The plot point in a movie is when things seem to undergo a twist and something unexpected happens to change the way events have been progressing so far. For the purposes of this curriculum, the Plot Point section is designed to turn the experience toward the Unitarian Universalist perspective.

Reflection questions are presented to encourage youth to consider how their faith helps them and how the ideas raised in the session are challenged or reinforced by the Principles or Sources of our Living Tradition.

Wrap Up

The climax of the session takes place in Wrap Up – a term which also refers to a process of tying up all the loose ends of a project. The core activity of this section is known as “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about what they’ve discovered as part of this session.

After the first “popper” has finished the statement, then everyone who agrees with this should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

This activity serves to provide closure to the ideas of the day, and affirms our youth in their ideas. By sharing their thoughts and having them affirmed by the other youth who also “pop,” their important need for shared experience and understanding with their peers is addressed.

However, if someone in your group has mobility limitations which could preclude them from popping up to a standing position, then it should be established from the beginning that all participants will pop up a hand – otherwise it could be left to personal discretion or as the mood strikes. There may be days when the youth are more energetic and will want to have a chance to leap to their feet, while on other days they will prefer to sit back and just raise a hand barely off of their lap to respond.

Following the Popcorn activity, the Closing Words serve as a very brief worship to close the session. If you will be holding these sessions as a Movie Night or – especially in the case of an Overnight – it is highly recommended that you consider extending the worship segment of the session.

There are many ways to add to the worship experience, even if you as a leader are not familiar with leading worship. You might ask your participants for some ideas of what they would like

to have included as worship; a few of them might even volunteer to be active participants in creating the worship experiences (this is particularly true of older youth). You can access a treasure trove of worship resources from the YRUU website, including the online documents *Blessings to All Beings: A Youth Spiritual Anthology* and *Deep Fun: A Compendium of YRUU Games* (many of which lend themselves to active youth worship experiences). These resources can be found at:

<http://www.uua.org/YRUU/resources/>

Before The Session Starts

Information you need as a leader for this program is located before the detailed rundown for the session. This includes:

- the objectives for the session
- materials and supplies you will need
- things to do ahead of time
- and a session outline

It is important that you review this section of the curriculum session plan in advance so you are familiar with all the materials you will need and what must be done in advance to prepare. If you will be running *Popcorn Theology* during an expanded time frame, you should also take time in advance to look over the suggestions for expanding the activities and discussion which appears at the end of the session plan.

The session outline gives you an overview of the activities which are a part of the plan for the day. Times given are only approximations, and are listed primarily for those groups who plan to cover the material in about an hour. Groups who will be showing the entire video in an expanded time format will need to adjust these times accordingly as there will probably be additional discussion and possibly more time to allow some of the activities to continue beyond the slated time frame.

Something To Think About

Careful, Careful

Because reading abilities differ considerably and reading aloud may cause anxiety for some participants, be sure to always ask for volunteers to read aloud rather than calling upon individuals.

Matches and lighters are very attractive to this age group and even young children in our congregations have been encouraged to use them to light candles or chalices. As a result, some youth may feel it is acceptable for them to light candles or play with the matches during moments when they are unsupervised. Keeping matches and lighters in a secure place when not in use helps to discourage experimenting outside of RE program time – and fiddling when they should have their attention elsewhere.

Although the videos selected for use with this program are rated PG or PG-13, some of them do contain some violent scenes or the suggestion of sexual situations. These may be issues of concern for some of the youth, the parents, or yourself as a leader. However, in these movies the violence is relevant to the subject matter (for example *Dances with Wolves* shows violence between Native Americans and the United States government and *Bowling for Columbine* explores the nature of violence in our society). Any sexual activity is implied (rather than overt) and any content which may raise concerns is detailed at the start of each session. If there is a concern over a parent or guardian's objection, then the use of a release form for individual sessions (or the program as a whole) can be used.

Food, Glorious Food

Indulging in food is an important part of the social experience for middle school and high school age youth. Many of the sessions call for serving of food and refreshments as part of the program's activities. Particularly if you will be offering these sessions as part of a Movie Night or overnight, you will want to make sure some snacks, food and refreshments are available as part of the experience.

However, whenever food is offered as part of an activity at a religious community, it is important to be aware of any participants with serious allergies or eating disorders who may feel excluded by the experience or pressured to participate despite their concerns. Through the creation of a group covenant at the beginning of the program, some guidelines for food and refreshments can be established (offering vegan alternatives, gluten-free selections, low calorie options, clear labeling of all food brought in, etc.)

Obtaining a Video License

Because the Copyright Act of 1976 gives copyright owners almost total control of the use of their copyrighted works, including the right to license the use of films and videos, churches which use movies in their programs should consider obtaining permission to show them. Pre-recorded videocassettes and videodiscs are specified by law as for home use only, unless permission is granted to show them in public. Without permission, you may be in violation of the Copyright Act and subject to substantial penalties. This is true even if the organization showing the video is non-profit and even if admission is not charged as part of the event.

However, permission can be obtained by either requesting specific written permission to be granted for the showing or by obtaining a church video license. Information and an application for obtaining a church video license can be found at the website for Christian Video Licensing International:

<http://www.cvli.org>



Needs Assessment

Materials You Will Need For Each Session

For each of the sessions, you will need:

- a chalice
- matches or a lighter
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- a DVD or VHS machine
- a television monitor
- a table where objects can be displayed
- wall space for posting papers (see *Meeting Room Requirements*)

Many of the sessions will require the following supplies, so you will want to keep them on hand:

- an easel with a tablet of newsprint
- markers and pencils
- magazines which can be cut up
- double-stick tape, glue or other adhesive
- posterboard, cardstock or paper

At the beginning of each session, you will find a listing of the materials and supplies you will need for that particular session as well as anything you should do in advance (such as make photocopies). A list of supplies by session is also part of the *Annotated Table of Contents* in the Appendix.

Some sessions require advance planning – particularly in the gathering of special materials which are needed for an activity (such as images of God/Goddess or articles with fear-inducing headlines from the internet). Be sure to read ahead of time the session plans and line up all the supplies you will need in advance. Avoid scrambling around at the last minute or you may find it necessary to do without. If you have any trouble locating an item or items, contact the DRE, MRE or RE support person at your congregation – just be sure to give him or her enough lead time to locate it for you.

Locating DVDs and Videotapes

Most of the films which are used by *Popcorn Theology* can be checked out of a local library's audio/visual department for no cost. If the video is not available from the public library, you can rent the DVD or videotape from any video store or online service.

If you will be offering this curriculum on a regular basis, you may want to invest in the purchase of the videos which are used in the sessions. All of the films used in this curriculum are listed in the *List of Movies By Session* page in the Appendix.

Meeting Room Requirements

Since watching a video is at the core of this program, you will need a meeting room which can accommodate your size group comfortably around a television. If your group meets on a morning or afternoon, a room with drapes (or at least a way of darkening the incoming light from windows) will make it much easier to see the images on the screen. This not only serves to provide better visuals (with stronger images and no irritating reflections), it also helps to focus the attention of the group on the TV monitor rather than one another or any possible distractions in the room.

Some of the sessions call for activities which require a large open space. If weather permits, some of these activities which require movement can be done outside. If not, you may need to temporarily move to a larger space where the group has the room to engage in the activity.

Many sessions involve posting papers or posters on the wall of the room. If you cannot hang papers directly on the wall of your meeting space, consider creating a bulletin board or "sticky wall" for this purpose. You can create your own "sticky wall" by purchasing a large piece of rip-stop nylon from a fabric store and spraying it with aerosol sticky mount (sold in photography and office supply stores).

Knowing Your Audience

Adolescence can be a confusing time for youth – and the adults around them. While their bodies are changing and quickly starting to resemble those of adults, their emotions and their behavior may still at times be more like that of children. As with all physical, emotional and intellectual development, youth progress at different rates. It's important to recognize this wide range of maturity as you set expectations for them and their behavior. Keeping a flexible mind set and being able to “roll with it” can keep your expectations realistic despite the inherent unpredictability of youth behavior.

The World of Adolescents.

Fluctuating hormones and the need for forming attachments with their peers take on a new significance in adolescence. Youth have a high need for acceptance and a feeling of safety within community. Those youth who do not yet feel secure in their beliefs or ideas may engage in seemingly disruptive behavior – joking around or ridiculing the process. They may also feel reluctant to share their true thoughts because they fear rejection by the group.

Creating a safe environment for all youth to share their ideas and express their opinions is crucial to building a community. This can be accomplished by the creation of a covenant, and through community building activities which bring the youth together in a social context. Therefore, even if you will not be doing all the sessions of *Popcorn Theology* as extended sessions, having some opportunity for longer gatherings with more time for socializing and sharing with one another is highly beneficial. If your youth need a chance to build a stronger community together, then using even a few of these sessions as extended programs or combined as an Overnight can make a real difference.

Likewise, maintaining an overall atmosphere of respect (toward the individual participants and the group as a whole) as well as developing an understanding of the groups' mood

on a given day can go a long way to finding success in your youth program.

Adolescents and Expectations.

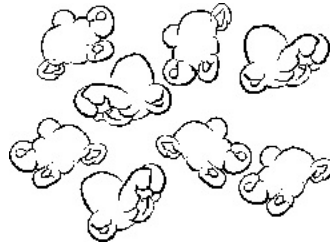
The older youth get, the greater the expectations that are placed upon them by schools, their families and the society at large. As the prefrontal cortex matures in the adolescent brain, teenagers can reason better, develop more control over their impulses and make better judgments.

When using *Popcorn Theology* with older youth, you can encourage their involvement whenever possible – including leading parts of (or even entire) sessions. You may find greater interest in discussion questions as the group matures and as their life experience grows. In that case, it may be beneficial to encourage more discussion and skip some of the physical activities designed to engage the younger youth in processing the material kinetically

However, adapting to the many changes in relationships, social status, and performance criteria which are part of adolescence in our culture can generate great stress, feelings of rejection, and anger at perceived or real failure. Some of the sessions of *Popcorn Theology* are designed to address these social concerns and stimulate discussion on these issues. As a result, some youth may share serious problems they are struggling with.

It is important that you let your youth know that confidentiality does have its limits. If you have reason to believe that someone in your group is in real need of counseling or is likely to cause danger to him/herself or others, than it is imperative that you notify the minister and/or religious educator at your congregation.

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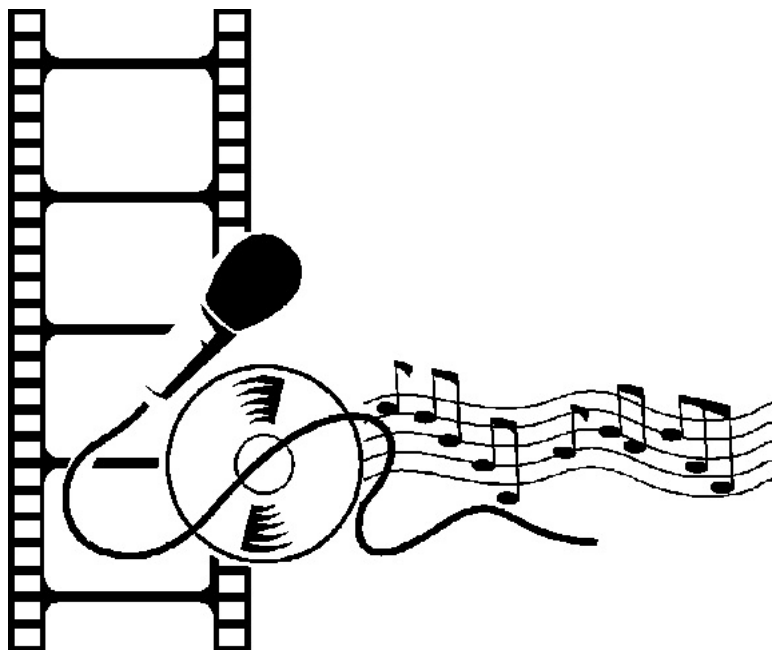


Unit One

The Choices We Make

Session One	No Blank Slate
Session Two	Don't Worry, Be Happy
Session Three	Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates
Session Four	Shades of Gray
Session Five	What Goes Around, Comes Around





Session One

No Blank Slate

The objectives of this session are:

- to examine how the choices we make affect our lives and the lives of others
- to see how our actions become significant when our choices affect the lives of others
- to consider the idea of Unitarian Universalism as a religion of choices

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Back to the Future*
- DVD player (or VCR) and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- newsprint
- markers
- unlined index cards
- stickers
- colored pencils
- plastic name tag holders
- large posterboard or paper (optional)
- *Jenga* game (or other wooden blocks which can be used to create a tower)
- other cause/effect games (optional) such as *Careers*, *Scrabble* or *Dominoes*

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole film, use the DVD menu to select scene #10 (Future Boy & Doc) or if using a VHS tape, cue it by finding the right segment approximately 48 minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Making Name tags. (5 min)

Creating a Covenant. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Back to The Future*. (20 min)

Rising Action: Tower Game. (10 min)

Plot Point: A UU Foundation. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn activity and Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

Invite the participants to create name tags for themselves using the index cards, stickers, markers and/or colored pencils. In addition to their names, invite the participants to share something about themselves by decorating the name tags with an image (or word which describes) their favorite food, favorite animal and favorite sport, hobby or activity. Once their name tags are complete, invite them to slip the cards into the plastic name tag holders and put them on.

Once all the participants have arrived and had time to create a nametag, invite each of the participants to share the designs they created on their nametags and to tell a little something about why they are their favorite foods, animals or sports. Remind the group that anyone always has the right to pass during times of sharing.

Creating a Covenant

Let the participants know that since this is the first time this particular group is meeting together in this way, it is important to create a covenant – or agreement for how you will act toward one another.

If your group has not engaged in this activity before, encourage the participants to brainstorm some ideas for how they should treat one another. (You might remind them that earlier you said, “Everyone should always have the right to pass during sharing. What other “rules” might we establish for our group so that everyone feels safe, comfortable and included?”)

Post all ideas on newsprint as you would with any standard brainstorming session, (but do not ask for any voting or priority ranking when you have finished) as all realistic ideas are valid for the class covenant. (However, comments such as “We should all get 20 bucks each time we attend” are clearly meant in jest and should not be taken seriously.)

After all ideas have been posted, ask all of the participants to read them over as a group. If you will be doing this as an extended session, you might have the participants create an attractive poster with the covenant on it. If not, you might ask for volunteers who would be willing to do this on their own time – before your next gathering. (But be sure to follow up sometime in the middle of the week if you give this out as an “assignment,” and keep a copy for yourself in case it “gets lost.”)

Premiere

Watching Back to the Future.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Back to the Future*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something along these lines:

This is the story of a boy who goes back in time and inadvertently messes up the meeting of his parents. By screwing up how they met he jeopardizes not only the future but his very existence if he is not able to bring the two of them together so that they fall in love, eventually get married, and have children.

Begin the video and watch scene #10 (Future Boy & Doc) and scene #11 (Marty’s

Problem) located approximately 48 minutes into the movie.

In these scenes, Marty tries to convince the Doc that he created a time machine and he needs his help to get back to the future. The Doc warns him not to do anything to inadvertently alter the time of events, but Marty admits he might already have done so when he messed up how his parents met each other. Now it is his task to get them together and fall in love or all the future events from that point – including his being born – will never happen.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video after fifteen minutes has passed and Marty’s father George says to Lorraine “I am your destiny” in the coffee shop causing her to look up at him dreamily.

Let the participants know that the movie ends with Marty going back to his own time only to discover everything has changed for the better because of the different circumstances which brought his parents together. Instead of falling in love with him because she felt sorry for him when her father hit him with the car, Lorraine falls in love because she is impressed by his standing up to the bully Biff. This simple difference resulted in parents who are confident and still deeply in love some twenty years later. And this resulted in a much different life for the whole family.

Ask the participants about how the choices we make affect our futures. Can one action change the outcome of the entire future? Have they made any choices that might have made a difference in their life or the life of others?

If the participants seem interested, and time allows, continue the discussion with questions like:

If you could go back in time and change ONE thing, what would it be?

What effect would that change have on history? Your life? On the lives of others?

How do our choices affect the lives of others?

How do we know we are making the right choices?

Wrap up the discussion by sharing a quote from Aldous Huxley, an English novelist:

*Experience is not
what happens to you,
its what you do with
what happens to you.*

Rising Action

Tower Game.

Play the game *Jenga* which involves carefully removing a piece from the tower of blocks (without causing it to fall down) and placing it on top. The objective is to see how high a tower you can build and how long you can go without it falling over. The choice of what piece to select to move becomes ever more crucial as the game progresses.

(Note: If you are unable to locate a *Jenga* game, a set of wooden blocks can be used to build a tower with each participant adding a piece to see how high a tower they can create. For this activity, different shaped and sized blocks will make this more challenging as participants will need to build from whatever type or shape blocks were selected by the persons before them.)

Plot Point

A UU Foundation.

Briefly process the experience of the Tower game. How did participants choose the pieces they did? How were those choices affected by the actions of others?

Share with the participants the idea of how being a Unitarian Universalist means making many choices. While other religions offer answers and religious truths to their children and youth, Unitarian Universalism requires a person to determine what is truth for them and to make choices about what they believe is right.

Use the blocks to illustrate the point as you work on building another tower, and encourage the participants to help you build it all together as a group.

Tell the participants how Unitarian Universalist religious education and worship offer the building blocks for us to use for decision making, but it is up to us to make choices as to what to include and what not to include as important and meaningful in our life.

We decide what goes where and how it all stacks up – our religion offers us a strong foundation (a community) from which we can choose to build any type of tower we wish.

Wrap Up

Popcorn Activity.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in an activity known as “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) on what they like about being a Unitarian Universalist.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says these closing words:

You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself
Any direction you choose.

– Dr. Seuss

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #556 “These Roses” by Ralph Waldo Emerson from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

Talk about how the 1980s were presented in the video (which was considered contemporary when the film was made), and how they were different from the way the 1950s were depicted. Talk about how life has changed since the 1980s – for example, how might the story be different if it was done as a remake in our times? What might life have been like if they were to go back in time and meet their parents as young people?

Talk about the future and what Marty and his girlfriend might see as they head off with Doc to discover what is “wrong with their kids.” Then compare this future to what life might be like when they are adults. Encourage the participants to create a skit to “act out” a sequel to this movie where Marty, Doc and his girlfriend travel to the future – or imagine they as a group of Unitarian Universalist youth have traveled into the future to see how things have changed.

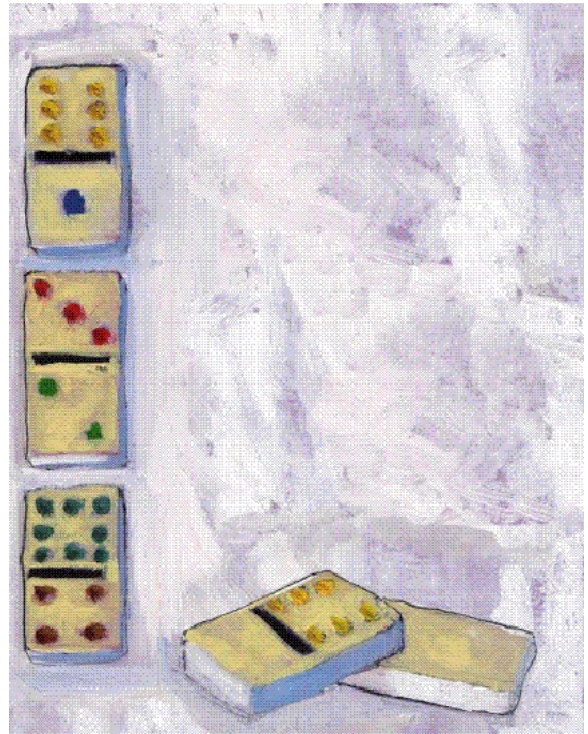
More Activities.

Play more cause-and-effect games, board games which involve choices or Card games. Some great ideas include:

Careers (everyone creates a plan for “success” with a combination of happiness, money and fame then tries to achieve this plan to win)

Scrabble (must build on words of others)

Dominoes (must build on tiles of others)



Session Two

Don't Worry, Be Happy

The objectives of this session are:

- to explore ideas about happiness
- to recognize how our expectations affect our happiness
- to discover the Hindu concept of santosha (contentment)

Materials and supplies you will need:

- the DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Star Trek: Generations*
- DVD or videotape player and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- flash paper (available in magic or novelty stores and the internet at sites like: <http://www.penguinmagic.com>)
- large black cauldron or cooking pot
- matches or lighter
- pencils
- posterboard
- old magazines to cut up for collage
- glue, glue sticks or other adhesive
- newsprint and markers (optional)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD (or videotape) and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- If you will not be watching the whole film, use the DVD menu to select scene #14 (The Captain of the Enterprise) or if using a videotape, cue it by finding the right scene approximately one hour and twenty-nine minutes into the program
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Happiness Collage. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Star Trek Generations*. (15 min)

Rising Action: Barriers to Happiness. (15 min)

Plot Point: Discovering Santosha. (10 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn activity and Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to create a collage of images which represent happiness.

After everyone has arrived and had some time to contribute to the group project, invite each of the participants to share some of the images they contributed to the group collage and why those images strike them as symbols of happiness. Remind the group that anyone always has the right to pass during times of sharing.

Premiere

Watching *Star Trek: Generations*.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Star Trek: Generations*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something to the effect of the following:

This is the story of two men who find themselves in The Nexus – a place where dreams come true. It has been described as a place of “pure joy” which is different for everyone who finds themselves in The Nexus.

Begin the video and watch scene #14 (The Captain of the Enterprise) – approximately one hour and twenty-nine minutes into the movie. In this scene, Picard tries to convince Kirk to leave the Nexus with him and stop the destruction of the star and the planet Veridian 3. Kirk is determined to stay in the Nexus and enjoy the chance to live his life over differently. However, after taking a horse out for a ride and jumping a gorge which always frightened him (but doesn't this time), he realizes that nothing in the Nexus is real. Once he realizes its not real, he no longer wants to stay and be a part of it.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video after ten minutes has passed and the two starship captains ride off on the horses to be engulfed in the white light – presumably the edge of the Nexus as they exit.

Begin by exploring the idea of the Nexus with the participants. What might a place of pure happiness be for them? Remind them that there is no time in the Nexus, and so it is possible for them to relive a moment in their life – or travel into the future to experience life which has not yet happened. Does this change what they would want to experience in such a place?

Remind the participants that Captain Kirk was determined to stay in the Nexus and live over a part of his life that he feels went wrong. Ask the participants about how regret can keep a person from experiencing happiness. How does regret keep a person from experiencing life to the fullest? How does wanting what we do not have – or wishing for what might have been – keep us from being happy?

Rising Action

Barriers to Happiness.

Explore with the participants the idea that regret is only one barrier to happiness. What might be some others? Worry? Fear? Anger?

Invite the participants to take some time and write down some words on flash paper – words which might keep a person from experiencing happiness. When everyone has finished writing, encourage them to take turns coming forward and lighting the paper on fire, then dropping it into the large pot or cauldron, announcing these words as they are destroyed. (Note: The flash paper should burn up and disappear in the air before it hits the cauldron, but using the pot can serve as a safety net in case something should go wrong.)

Then encourage the participants to consider what creates happiness – having everything you want or being content with what you have? Encourage some discussion on this idea.

Plot Point

Discovering Santosha.

Inform the participants that the word *santosha* is a Sanskrit word meaning “contentment.” This ancient concept expresses the idea that contentment – rather than the obtaining of gratification – is the source of true happiness. Why might this be better than the idea of happiness- as-bliss which is prevalent in our culture?

According to Hindus, *santosha* (or contentment) is the natural state of our humanity which allows for our creativity and love to emerge. It helps us to know our place in the universe at every moment and is unity with the largest, most abiding, reality. *Santosha* is above all – a way of achieving inner peace.

Invite the participants to consider:

How can this concept be meaningful to us as Unitarian Universalists?

How can we learn to feel the concept of *santosha* and achieve contentment with our own lives rather than yearn for what we do not have?

How might seeking contentment bring happiness to our lives?

How can we learn to accept our life and be happy with what we have?

How does our faith guide us in searching for contentment rather than longing for things which we do not have?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in an activity known as “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something which brings contentment to their life.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or other participants take turns saying these closing words:

Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.

– Abraham Lincoln, Former President of the United States

The pursuit of happiness is a most ridiculous phrase; if you pursue happiness you'll never find it.

– C. P. Snow, 20th century English novelist and scientist

Many persons have a wrong idea of what constitutes true happiness. It is not attained through self-gratification but through fidelity to a worthy purpose.

– Helen Keller, 20th century educator and advocate for the disabled

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #505 “Let Us Be At Peace” by Thich Nhat Hanh from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

Why might Soran have been willing to do anything – including murder a planet full of people – in order to return to the Nexus? Have you ever done something to hurt others in the pursuit of happiness? Have you ever been hurt by others who were seeking happiness for themselves? How did that turn out?

Why was Kirk willing to give up the happiness he found in the Nexus once he realized it wasn't real? How might this make a difference? Would you choose happiness – even if you knew it was just an illusion?

When Data is happy to find his cat Spot alive, yet realizes he was crying, he wonders if his emotion chip is failing, but is reassured that it is functioning just fine. Have you ever been puzzled by your behavior in relation to your feelings? How does the expression of emotions – particularly strong ones – evoke unpredictable behavior?

At the end of the film, Picard says: “Someone once told me that time was a predator that stalked us all our lives. I rather believe that time is a companion who goes with us on the journey and reminds us to cherish every moment, because it will never come again. What we leave behind is not as important as how we've lived.” What do you think about this statement?

More Activities.

Santosha is also the second *niyama* (self-discipline) of yoga practitioners. Invite a yoga instructor to visit your group to lead you through some *asanas* (yoga poses) and meditative breathing to help you further explore the concept of santosha.

Create another mural – this time using the concept of contentment/santosha – with ideas and images of things which bring inner peace.

Listen to some music with the theme of finding happiness. Consider: What are these songs communicating about happiness? Are they promoting the idea of contentment = happiness or are they emphasizing the seeking of bliss? Here are some ideas for songs on the theme of happiness:

“Don’t Worry, Be Happy” (Bobby McFerrin)
“Happiness Runs” (Donovan)
“Let the Happiness In” (Sylvian David)
“Love and Happiness” (John Mellencamp)
“I’ve Been Lonely for So Long” (Mick Jagger)
“This Way to Happiness” (Frey Glenn)
“Dancing on the Jetty” (INXS)
“Happiness Is” (Verve Pipe)
“Bliss” (Muse)
“Happiness” (Vanessa Williams)
“Rivers of Joy (No Angels)
“Hello Happiness Goodbye Loneliness” (Buck Owens)



Session Three

Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates

Note: The movie used in this session, Forrest Gump, is rated PG-13 due to some graphic violence, and brief sexual situations. These factors should be considered if you are thinking of watching the entire movie instead of just an excerpt.

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider how a positive outlook on life can make a difference
- to understand the concept of gratitude in developing that positive outlook
- to explore ways in which we all create our own destinies through either a positive or negative outlook on life

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Forrest Gump*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- blank puzzle the group can create together (available in specialty stores or online) or alternatively, a large piece of posterboard cut into puzzle pieces
- fancy box of chocolates with a variety of candies inside
- markers or colored pencils
- votive candles (one for each participant)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #11 "Happy New Year," or if using a videotape, cue to approximately one hour and 17 minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)

- set out the votive candles on a small table in your meeting space

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Community Puzzle. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Forrest Gump*. (30 min)

Rising Action: Attitude of Gratitude. (10 min)

Plot Point: Box of Chocolates. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (5 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to take one of the blank puzzle pieces and decorate it. After everyone has arrived, encourage the group to assemble the puzzle to see what they have created together as a group. How do their designs mesh with one another? Do they notice any themes or larger designs as assembled? How do the individual pictures change when grouped together as a whole?

Premiere

Watching Forrest Gump.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Forrest Gump*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, we meet a man named Forrest Gump. As he waits at the bus stop, he shares a box of chocolates and the story of his life with some strangers.

We learn that after he graduated from college, he joined the military and went overseas

to fight in the Vietnam War. After a heavy fire fight during which he was encouraged to run to safety, he instead ran back multiple times to rescue his injured friends and the Lieutenant who led his squad of soldiers.

Begin the video and watch scene #11 (Happy New Year) followed by scene #12 (Shrimp Boat Captain), scene #13 (Bubba Gump) and the beginning of scene #14 (Mama Goes to Heaven).

In this sequence, Forrest has met up with Lt. Dan and they are in his small, dark New York City apartment. Lt. Dan is still very bitter about the injuries he received in the war. He laments about all the comments he hears at the Veterans Administration. He tells Forrest how a priest told him that if he accepted Jesus into his heart, he'll get to walk beside him in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Forrest and Lt. Dan go to a bar to celebrate New Year's Eve and Forrest tells his friend about his plan to buy a shrimp boat and go into the shrimping business in order to honor a promise he made to his best friend who died in Vietnam. Lt. Dan sarcastically tells Forrest that if he is ever a shrimp boat captain, then he will be his first mate.

Two women, obviously well acquainted with Lt. Dan approach, and one of the women tells Forrest she just loves New Years Eve because it's a chance to start over – its like a reminder that everyone gets a second chance.

The two women they met in the bar return to Lt. Dan's apartment with him and Forrest. When one of the women attempts to seduce Forrest and he resists, she calls him stupid. The other woman joins in the taunt, and Lt. Dan throws them both out.

Lt. Dan falls out of his wheelchair, but resists Forrest's help to get back in. Forrest apologizes for ruining the evening. Forrest realizes Lt. Dan didn't like to be called names anymore than he did.

After he is discharged from the Army, Forrest goes home to see his mother who tells him about all the offers for endorsements he's received while he was away. She encourages him to tell "a little white lie" about liking one company's paddle so they can get the offered \$25,000 and he uses the money to buy his shrimping boat.

The shrimping business turns out to be more of a challenge than Forrest anticipated. He catches more trash from the ocean floor than shrimp.

Forrest discovers Lt. Dan waiting on the dock for him, ready to fulfill the promise he made to be the first mate if he ever does go into the shrimping business. However, even with Lt. Dan's help they still struggle to pull in much shrimp.

Lt. Dan sarcastically suggests that Forrest pray for some shrimp, and Forrest begins going to church regularly. After another useless haul with a net full of ocean trash and only a few meager shrimp, Lt. Dan bitterly says, "Where the Hell is that God of yours?"

Soon after, Forrest claims God did show up in the form of hurricane force winds. While Forrest is scared as the boat is tossed around in the storm, Lt. Dan angrily challenges God to "take him."

They manage to survive the storm, and it turns out that their boat was the only one to do so. As a result, they begin to make a fortune in the shrimping business because the hurricane eliminated everyone else's shrimping boats.

Lt. Dan says he never thanked Forrest for saving his life. Lt. Dan dives overboard and swims in the sea happily and Forrest muses that Lt. Dan "must have made peace with God."

Forrest returns home to learn his mother is dying. She tells him that its just "her time" and that "we all make our own destiny." She also tells him that "we have to do the best with what God gives you."

Forrest wonders aloud what his destiny is. She says he needs to figure it out for himself. Then she tells him "life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get."

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video after his mother says, "I'm going to miss you, Forrest."

Ask for first impressions of the video. Then, invite reflection on some questions like:

Why was Lt. Dan so bitter about life and God, and why did that change?

Did Lt. Dan make “peace with God” as Forrest believed, or did he make peace with something/someone else?

Why was he finally able to thank Forrest for saving his life?

Forrest keeps thinking about Jenny and wondering if she is happy when clearly she is not. How is the way she is choosing to live her life creating some of the unhappiness she experiences?

How is her attitude and the attitude of Lt. Dan similar before he gets his change of heart?

Rising Action

Attitude of Gratitude.

Forrest always looks for the best in other people, and on the bright side of life. Through his simple outlook, he had a way of pointing out the truth about life. He also had a way of feeling grateful for the good things he had, rather than feeling cheated because of what he did not have. Invite the participants to consider:

How might this attitude of gratitude made a difference in his life?

Do you look at life with an attitude of gratitude? When do you feel grateful?

When might you forget to be grateful for what you have and instead let yourself dwell upon what you don't have?

Let the participants know that although we usually associate the concept of gratitude with an indebtedness to another person (or divine power), an attitude of gratitude can help us to appreciate the good things we have in life. We tend to take so much of what is good in our life for granted and instead notice what is wrong. Our house, our alarm clock, the food we have in the refrigerator; all of these things tend to be taken for granted unless we can no longer count on them to be there.

Invite the participants to light a votive candle – and as they do so, to announce to the group something in their lives which they are grateful for.

Plot Point

Box of Chocolates.

Remind participants that Forrest's mother said “life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get.” Open up the box of chocolates (and share them with the participants if desired; see note which follows). Explore how some of the chocolates in the box are different, and some have a filling which is unapparent from the outside. (You might break one or two open if the group will not be tasting them). Some of the chocolates may be appealing to the taste, and some may not. Some may have hard nuts inside and some may have a smooth, creamy filling. But often, you really don't know what you're going to be getting unless you take the chance ... and perhaps take a bite.

Note: Be very cautious in letting the group sample the chocolates if you are aware of someone in your group who has allergies to chocolate and/or nuts, or someone who has emotional issues around food. This could cause someone to feel excluded from the activity or feel the pressure to join in on the tasting despite their misgivings.

Ask the participants to consider how a piece of chocolate candy could be deliciously sweet for one person, while for another person it could be very unpalatable (even deadly if they are allergic). How is this similar to life? How might an attitude of gratitude make a difference in how we react to the “chocolates” we get in life?

Reflect back to the entering activity and the puzzle the group made together. How might this puzzle look if the pieces were taken apart and put together differently? Do we have any control over how the puzzle pieces of our life fit together – any more than we have over the “box of chocolates” we may be given? Why or why not? Even if we do not have control over what we are given, how can our attitude toward our life make a difference?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something (or someone) they may have taken for granted in their life.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

Can you see the holiness in those things you take for granted--a paved road or a washing machine? If you concentrate on finding what is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul.

– Rabbi Harold Kushner,
(contemporary Rabbi and author)

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #515 “We Lift Up Our Hearts in Thanks” by Richard M. Fewkes from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

You might say Forrest actually saved Lt. Dan’s life twice – once when he pulled him out harms way on the battlefield, and again when they went into the shrimping business together. Has anyone “saved” your life by helping you to get over a serious problem or through a tough challenge?

Resource 3-A has some insightful comments of Forrest or his mother which can be used as a springboard for further discussion. You can photocopy these statements and related questions, cut them into strips and place in a basket to pass around. Invite each participant who would like to volunteer to pick one selection out of the basket and present it to the group. They need not answer the questions themselves (unless they want to), but pose the questions to the group for answers.

More Activities.

If you have a particularly active group, you can arrange for a ping pong table and some paddles for a ping pong tournament or hold a relay race.

Have a Metaphor Challenge. Invite participants to come up with their own metaphors for life (or similes, as in “Life is like a box of chocolates”). After everyone comes up with a metaphor and shares it with the group, encourage the group to classify the metaphor as either positive or negative. Reward the person with the most positive metaphor for life.

Share some food with a Forrest Gump flare. You can find lots of themed recipes in the books *Bubba Gump Shrimp Company Cookbook: Recipes and Reflections from Forrest Gump* or *Forrest Gump: My Favorite Chocolate Recipes* by Winston Groom.

Resource 3-A Forrest-Style Wisdom

“God didn’t make us all the same.” Why is conformity so important to people? How can diversity and individuality be good things in a society which expects that which is “normal”?

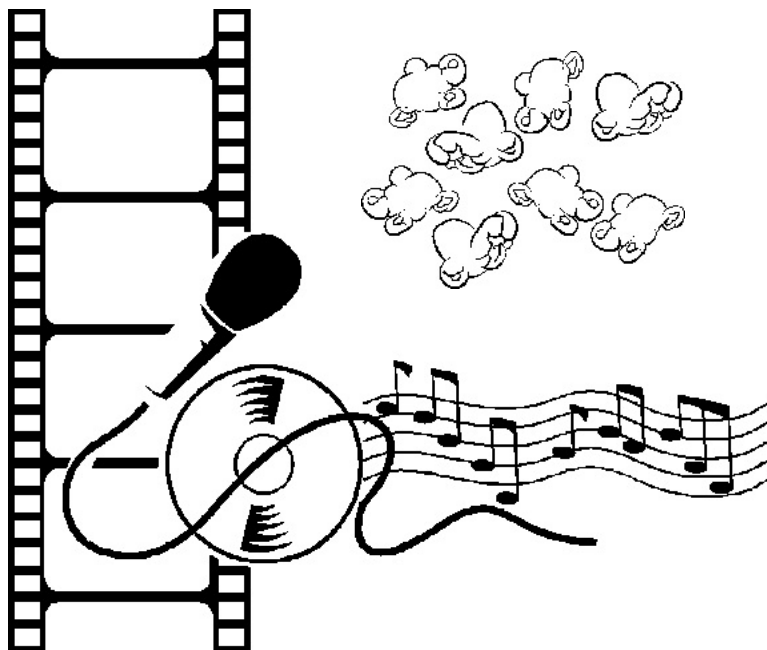
“A promise is a promise.” Have you ever made a promise that was difficult to keep? What happened if you broke that promise?

“Sometimes we do things that don’t make sense.” When has someone close to you done something that didn’t make sense? How were you able to deal with it?

“You can tell a lot about a person by their shoes – what they do, where they’ve been.” What do your shoes tell about you? Do they reflect your lifestyle, your passions, your personality?

“Sometimes there just aren’t enough rocks.” What does this mean? (Forrest said this when Jenny began throwing rocks at the home where she grew up.) Have there been any time in your life when you felt as if there weren’t enough rocks?

“I don't know if we each have a destiny, or if we're all just floating around accidental-like on a breeze, but I think, maybe it's both, maybe both are happening at the same time.” What do you think? Do we have a destiny, or are just floating around accidental-like on a breeze?



Session Four

Shades of Gray

Note: The movie used in this session, Saved! is rated PG-13 due to some sexual content, adult language, the depiction of teen pregnancy and teenage smoking. These factors should be considered if you are thinking of watching the entire movie instead of just an excerpt.

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider what it means to be “good”
- to recognize “the shades of gray” which color ideas of what is good and what is bad
- to explore the idea of inherent worth and dignity for all persons in light of these “gray areas”

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Saved!*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- copies of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles (optional)
- pencils and/or charcoal art supplies (optional)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #15 (Blame and Punishment) or if using a videotape, cue to approximately one hour and three minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- make copies of the grayscale pictures in Resource 4-B and hang on the walls for the entering activity
- make two signs (one reading “Agree” and one “Disagree”) – hang on opposite walls of your meeting space

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Grayscale pictures. (5 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Saved!* (30 min)

Rising Action: What Would You Do? (10 min)

Plot Point: Shades of Gray. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look at the pictures you have posted on the wall (from Resource 4-B). Ask them to identify what all the pictures have in common (and its not that they are all in black and white).

After everyone has had a chance to look over the pictures and reached some conclusions, invite some participants to share what the similarities are between the pictures. (Answer: they are all in *grayscale* – a picture or image composed of shades of gray varying from black at the weakest intensity to white at the strongest.)

Ask why it would not be appropriate to describe these images as “black and white” but instead as composed of shades in variants of gray. What happens when we look at the extremes – but not the in-betweens?

Premiere

Watching *Saved!*

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Saved!* Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, a young girl name Mary learns that her boyfriend, Dean, is gay. During an incident in which she nearly drowns, she believes she has a vision of Jesus telling her to “save” her boyfriend Dean. She interprets this to mean she should have sex with him in order to “cure” him. Of course, it doesn’t work. Then his parents send him away to a special Christian facility for “degayification” and she discovers that she is pregnant. This causes her to question her faith, her belief in what is right – and just who her friends really are.

Begin the video and watch scene #15 (Blame and Punishment) followed by scene #16 (Night of Surprises), scene #17 (“Go Ahead, Swear It”), scene #18 (A Big Gray Area), scene #19 (Hillary Faye’s Salvation) and scene #20 (As Planned).

In these scenes, Mary arrives at school with her new friends Cassandra and Roland only to discover the school is covered with graffiti. After searching the lockers, cans of spray paint are found in Mary and Cassandra’s lockers. However, while searching Mary’s locker, a teacher also discovers a sonogram – thereby exposing the secret Mary has been concealing for so long.

The school’s principal (Pastor Skip) and Mary’s mother (who have been long tempted to have an affair) are upset by the revelation. Pastor Skip believes Mary’s pregnancy is punishment for their indiscretions and has clouded their ability to see what was happening.

Sometime later, Mary gets a phone call from Cassandra and sneaks out of the house to meet her and Roland at the Café. They are all decked out in prom finery. Roland explains he has Hillary Faye’s credit card statement which proves she bought the spray paint and must have framed them for the deed.

But that is not the only surprise they have for Mary. Cassandra has bought her a fancy prom dress, and even managed to get her a date – Pastor Skip’s son, Patrick (who has had a crush on Mary since the start of their senior year). She is surprised that he is still interested in her even after discovering that she is pregnant. He tells her that “it really doesn’t matter.”

Mary and Patrick arrive at the Prom with Cassandra and Roland, but when Hillary Faye sees them, she is livid. She insists that Pastor Skip throw them out. But he says they should stay because it is “the Christian thing to do.”

Hillary loses her cool at that point and insults Mary for being pregnant. Roland presents the credit card receipt which proves Hillary bought the spray paint and framed the other two girls. When Hillary’s plot is exposed, she hysterically claims that Jesus told her to do it.

As Hillary flees the Prom, a bus pulls up from Mercy House with Dean and his prom date – his male roommate from the Christian “degayification” center. He is surprised to see that Mary is pregnant – but she is happy to see that he has found peace with who he is and found love with his roommate.

However, Pastor Skip is not so pleased to see Dean, his boyfriend, or the other teens from Mercy House. He asks them to leave, but Dean insists he has a right to enjoy his senior prom like everyone else at his school. Pastor Skip protests by saying “this is not a gray area here.” He goes on to say “there is no room for moral ambiguity here, the Bible is very clear.”

Mary protests that “no one fits in 100% of the time – not even you.” Dean says that he knows in his heart that Jesus still loves him. Then Mary asks, “Why did God make us all different if he wanted us to be the same?”

Their conversation is cut short by the sound of a racing engine as Hillary Faye drives her van into a large Jesus billboard. After climbing out of the van unharmed but obviously shaken up, she asks her brother if he thought Jesus still loved her. Then Cassandra helps Hillary Faye up, guiding her toward an arriving ambulance.

But the ambulance is for Mary who has gone into labor. As everyone tries to decide who will be the one person to accompany her to the hospital in the ambulance, Mary’s mother arrives and climbs in.

After the baby is born, Mary muses over the miracle that is her daughter. She seems to have rediscovered her faith as she explains that in looking at the baby she feels life is too amazing to be just random and that there had to be a God out

there somewhere. She said maybe this hadn't all turned out as He planned (or as anyone planned), but it had turned out well. Then she wonders "What would Jesus do? I guess we'll just figure it out together."

Stop the video as the credits begin. Start by asking first impressions of what the group just watched. Then, invite reflection on some questions like:

What did Pastor Skip mean by "it's the Christian thing to do" when he refused to force Mary and Cassandra to leave? How did this change when he asked Dean and his boyfriend to leave?

How did Dean's willingness to stand up to Pastor Skip make a difference in Mary's attitude toward his homosexuality? How did his actions empower her to accept her own mistakes?

Both Mary and Hillary Faye believed that "Jesus told them to." Why might they have felt that way? How did this help them to escape responsibility for their behavior?

Why didn't it matter to Patrick that Mary was pregnant? And how did his attitude toward her predicament change her own attitude?

Rising Action

What Would You Do?

Remind participants that in this movie, there were a lot of good people doing what could be considered "bad" things – and a lot of people who'd been labeled "bad" (like Cassandra) doing good things. But how do we determine what is right and what is wrong?

Let the participants know we will explore this issue through a values exercise. For this activity, you will read off a statement and they must find the spot at the wall they feel best represents their viewpoint. They may choose either "Agree" or "Disagree" – but they may not stand anywhere in between.

Read off the statements in Resource 4-A (one at a time) giving all the participants a chance to find their places. After each participant has selected their spot for the statement, ask if anyone would like to share why they are where they are. Then read off the next statement, and invite them to change places.

After you have gone through the entire list, ask the participants for some feedback. Was it hard to choose between only two options? Why or why not? Would it have made a difference if they could have stood somewhere between the two options of "agree and "disagree"? (If time permits, and participants seem interested, you can go back over the statements, this time letting them choose any spot along a continuum between the two points of "agree" and "disagree.") Why might someone choose a different spot if more than two options were available?

Plot Point

Shades of Gray.

Remind participants that Pastor Skip said "there is no gray area here." How do Unitarian Universalists see this issue? Where are the gray areas for us? Do we have any ideas which are not "morally ambiguous?" How does our belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all persons factor in to the equation? What about respect for the interdependent web of life? Are there any gray areas here, or is it as simple as it sounds?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, "Popcorn." For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they believe is "good" in their life.

After the first "popper" has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this

statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

Darkness cannot drive out darkness;
only light can do that. Hate cannot
drive out hate; only love can do that.

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, jr.

End the session with a unison reading of Reading # 461 “We Must Be Saved,” from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

Pastor Skip said the Bible was clear on the issue of homosexuality. What other behavior or ideas do evangelical Christians claim there is no moral ambiguity on? Is the Bible clear on this?

How did the birth of Mary’s baby renew her faith? Was that the only thing which contributed to her new sense of things turning out well, or was it something more?

While watching the play of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, Mary wonders if the Virgin Mary “made it all up.” She says she understands how a person might do that. Later, Patrick shows her that he cares for her despite her pregnancy. How does this

compare to the story of Mary (the mother of Jesus) and the man Joseph who would become her husband? (*Matthew 1:19-24 says that Joseph wanted to call off the marriage after he found out about the pregnancy. But then an angel appeared to him in a dream, told him about Jesus, and convinced him to accept Mary as his wife..*)

More Activities.

Go on a hunt through the Hebrew and Christian Bibles to see if the group can find a clear statement against homosexuality, abortion or any other belief that evangelical Christians claim as Truth. See if the group can find any references to moral behavior in the Bible which are now rejected by society as inappropriate (such as the ownership of slaves)? Hint: check *Leviticus*.

Using pencils or charcoal, invite the participants to create their own grayscale pictures.



Resource 4-A
What Is Good and What is Bad?

It is never okay to take a human life.

Abortion is murder.

The death penalty is wrong.

War is always a bad idea.

Stealing is wrong.

It's okay to copy a friend's computer game onto my computer.

Friends sometimes hurt each other's feelings.

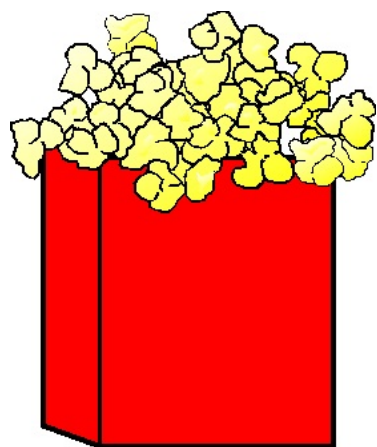
Revenge is sweet.

It's never okay to call someone names.

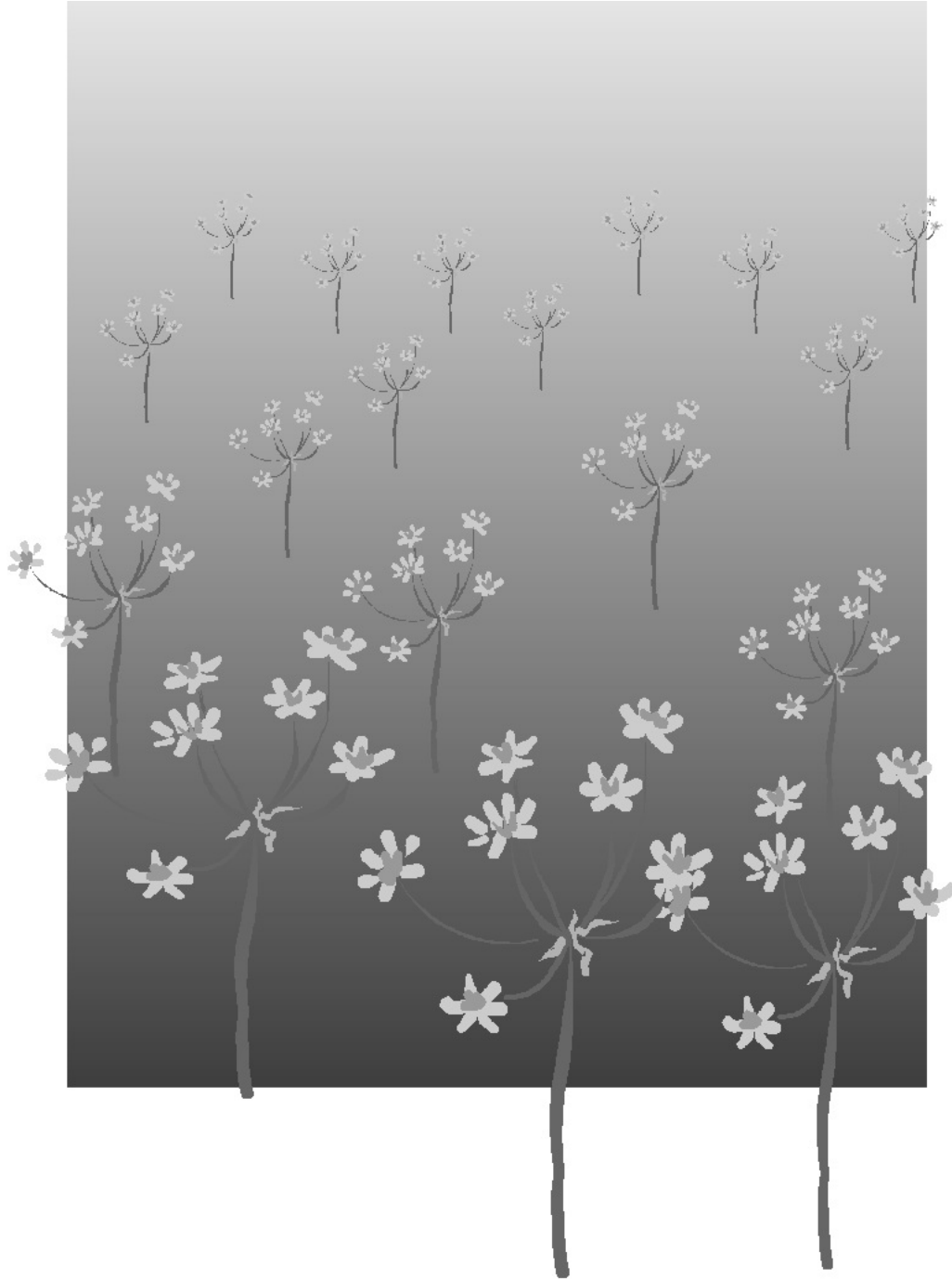
Taking credit for someone else's work is fine.

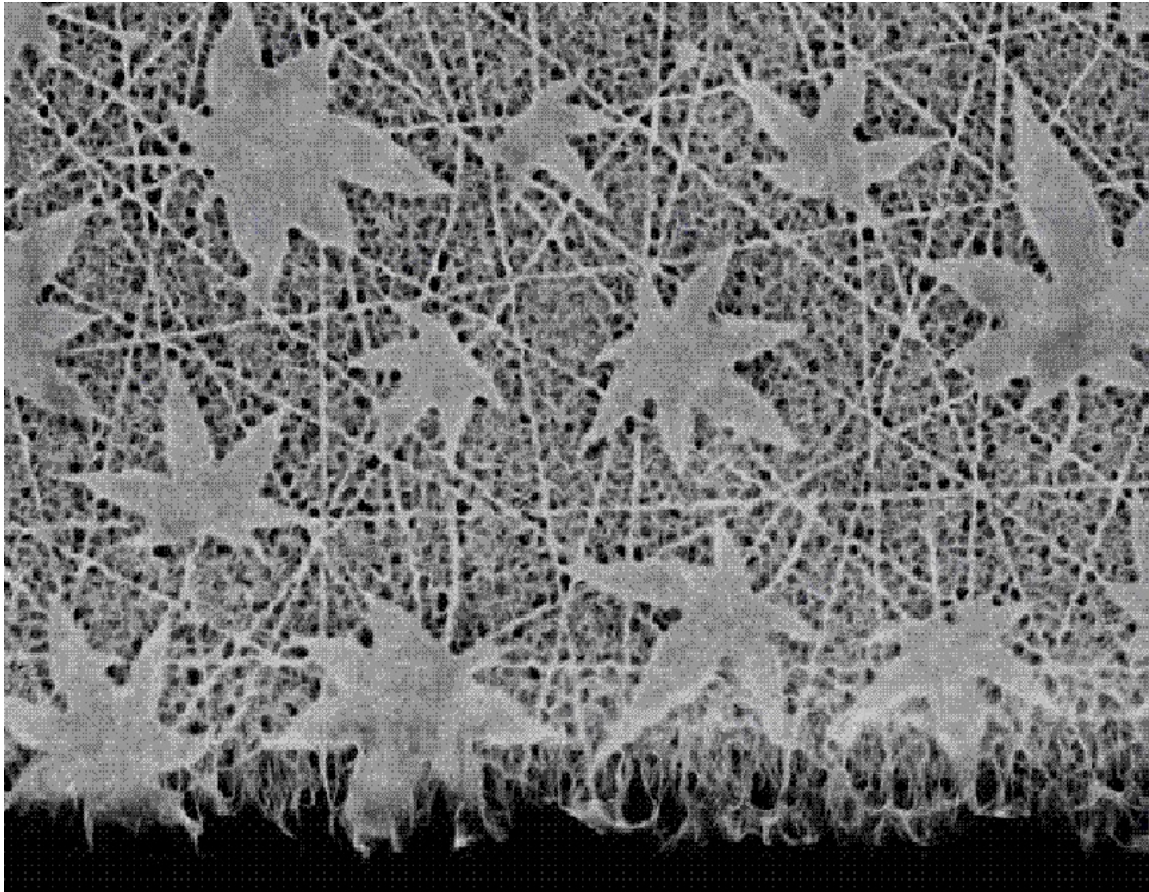
Letting someone else take the blame is wrong.

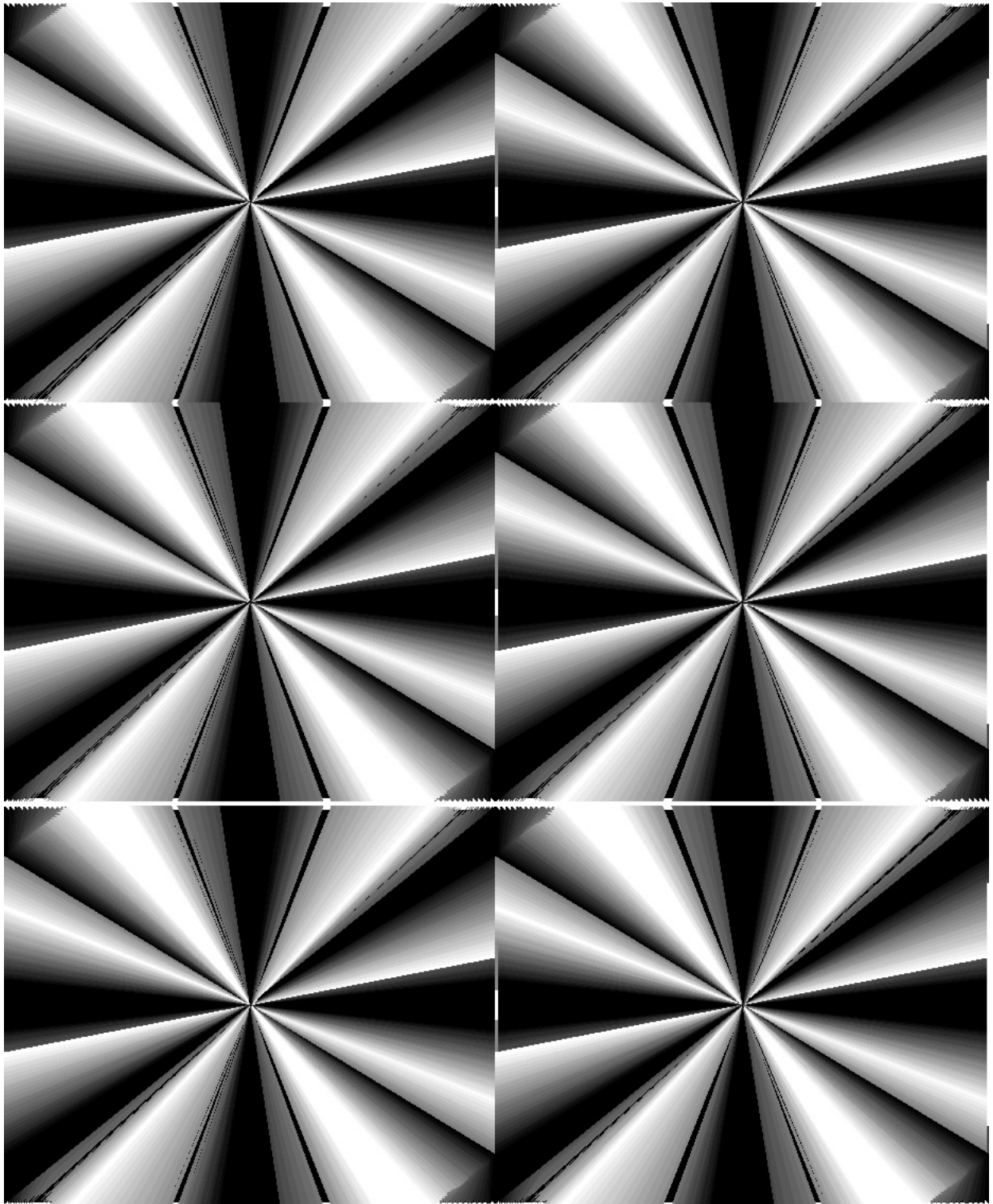
It's okay if I put down others.

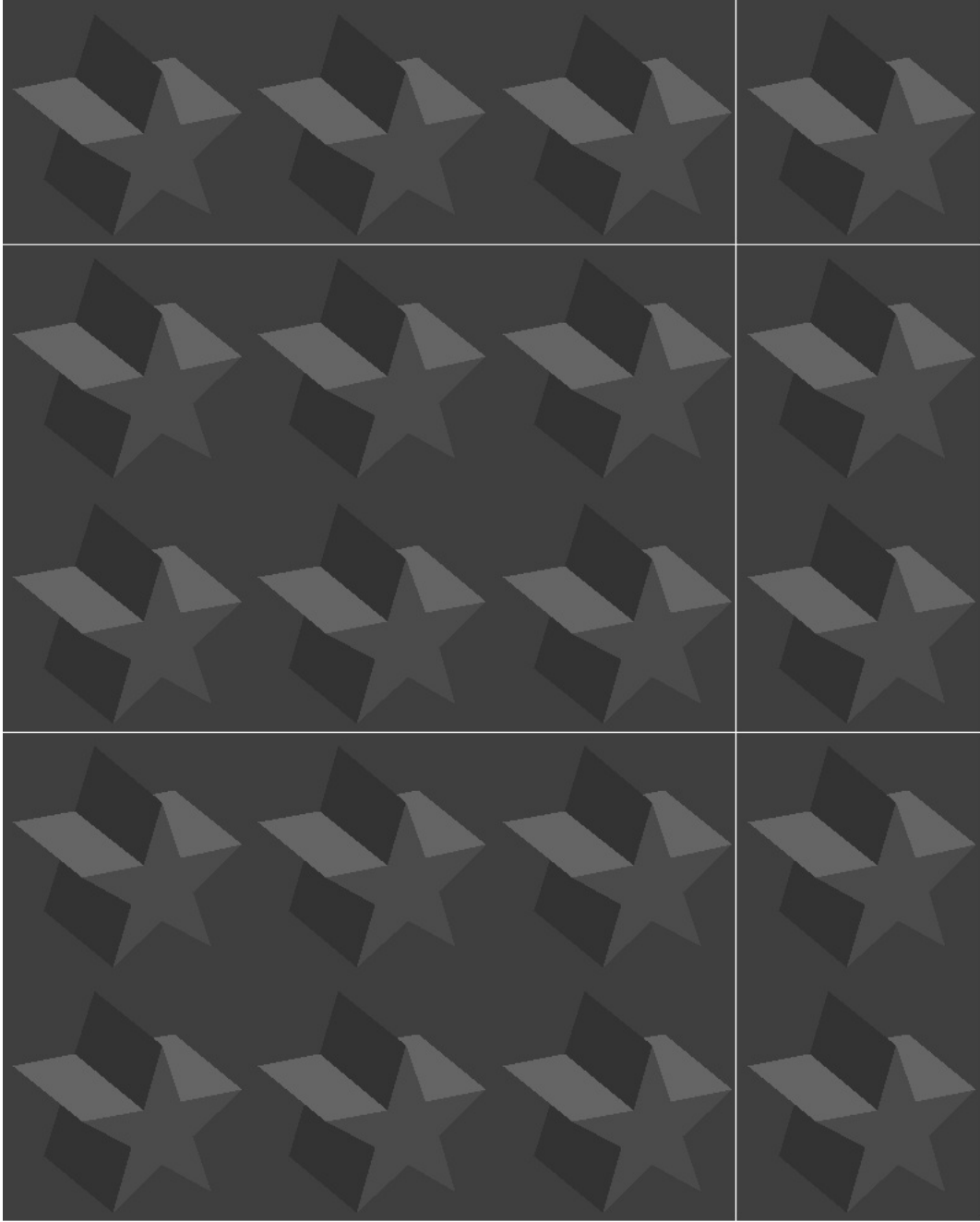


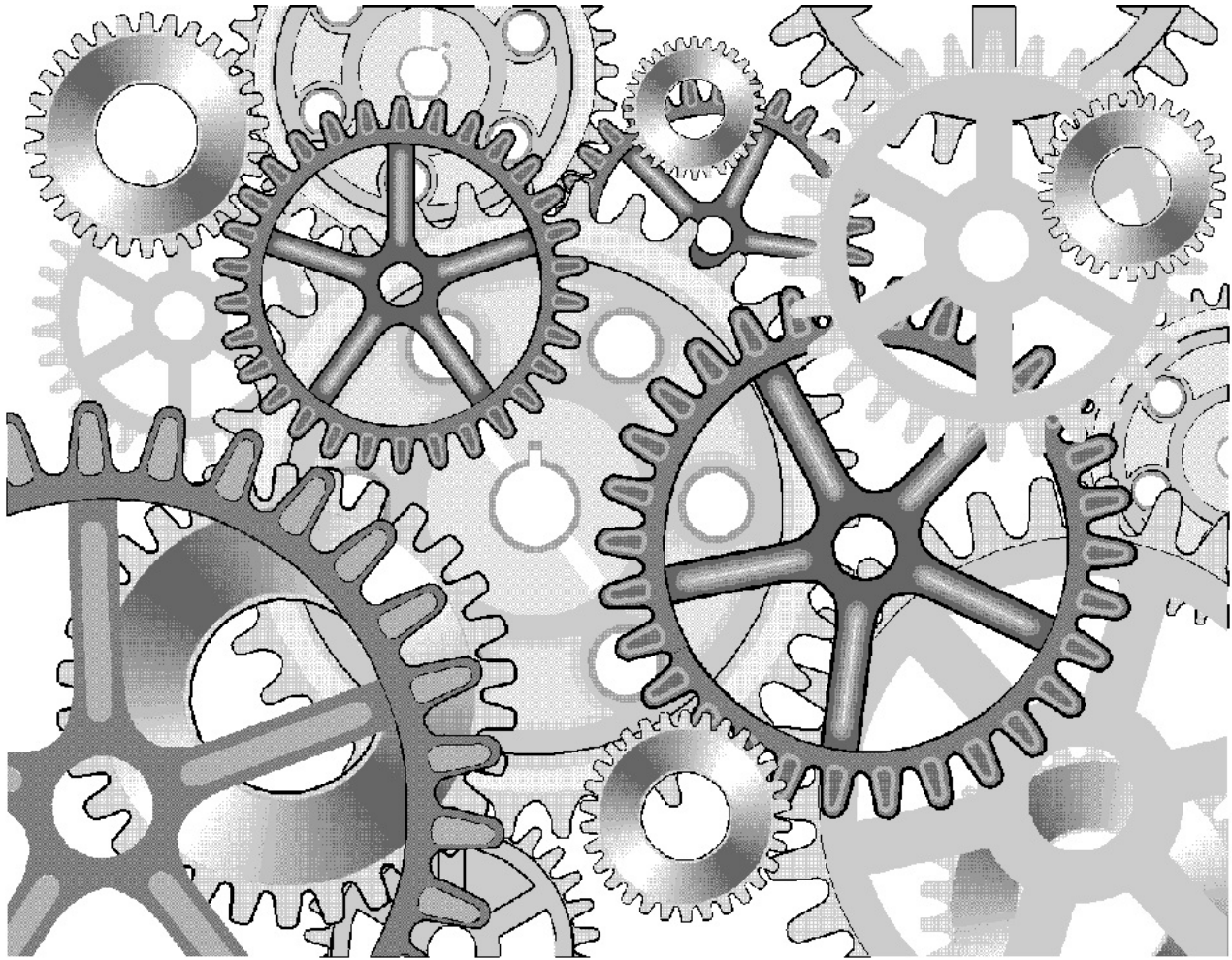
Resource 4-B
Grayscale Pictures

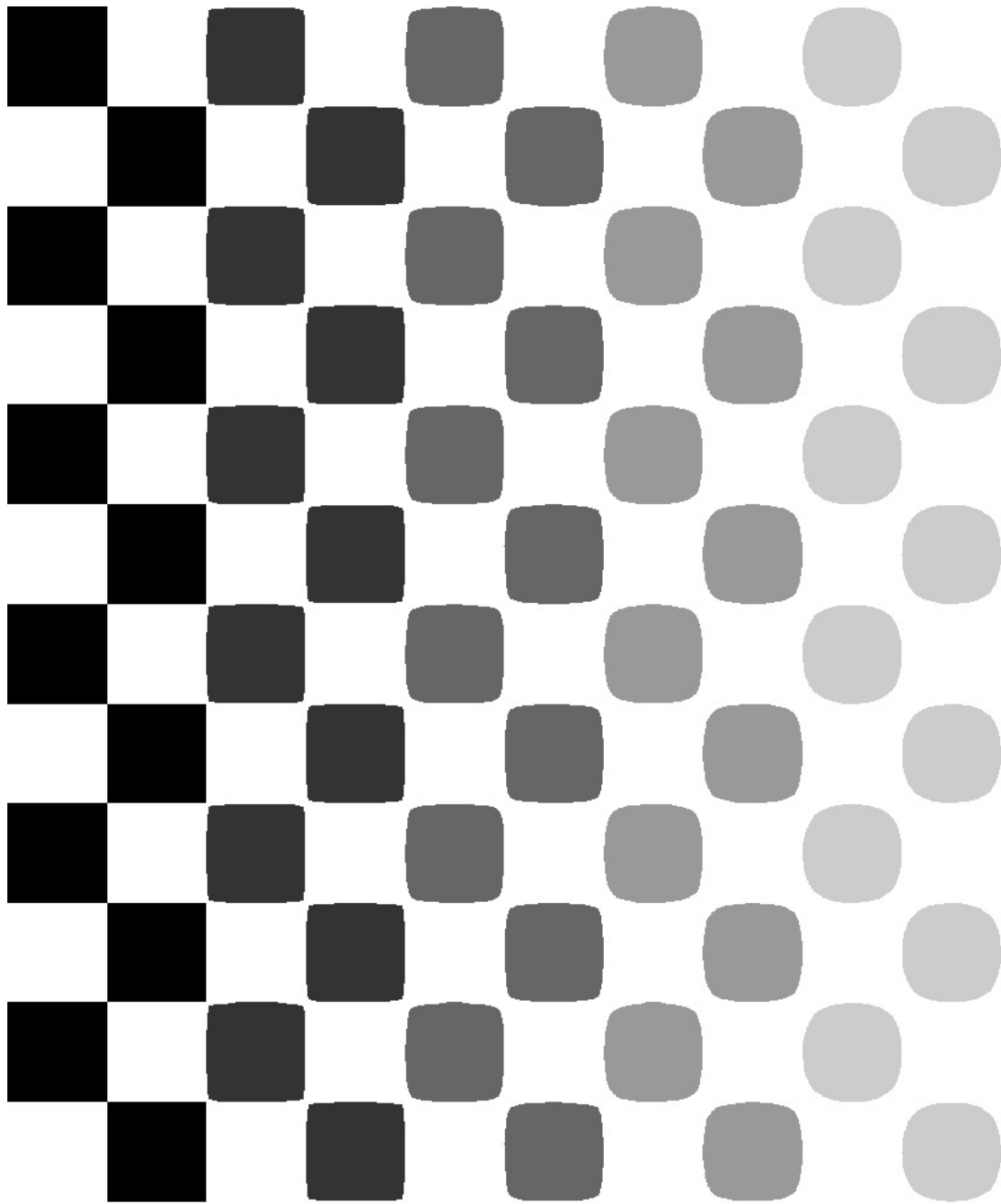












Session Five

What Goes Around Comes Around

The objectives of this session are:

- to explore the concept of karma as a system of cosmic fairness
- to understand how our actions and choices can result in consequences which can be positive or negative
- to realize karma can have an impact on us as Unitarian Universalists as we work toward a peaceful, fair world and as we respect the interdependent web of all existence

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Little Buddha*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- Simple Cause/Effect games such as a set of Dominoes, Pick Up Sticks, building blocks, “Mousetrap” game
- masking tape
- heavy cardstock
- two boxes painted or drawn to look like oversize dice (or as an alternative, two normal size dice)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select the opening scene or cue the videotape to the opening sequence
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- with masking tape, mark off squares in a steady path like a giant game board on the floor; the path should return to itself to

- create a loop pattern at some point
- mark every three spaces with an “X” in masking tape
- create some large dice by decorating two boxes with black dots on a white background
- make a copy of the Karma cards (in Resource 5-A) on heavy cardstock, and cut them apart

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Cause/Effect Games. (5 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Little Buddha*. (30 min)

Rising Action: The Karma Game. (15 min)

Plot Point: UU Karma. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (5 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to have fun with the simple Cause/Effect games you have provided such as Dominoes, building blocks or Pick-Up Sticks.

Premiere

Watching *Little Buddha*.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Little Buddha*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the tape yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, some Tibetan monks believe an American boy might just be the reincarnation of a Buddhist monk and great

teacher. Despite the initial scepticism of his parents, they travel to the East to learn more about Buddhism and the man who he might become. Along the way, he discovers the story of Siddhartha (the man who would become "enlightened" and be ever after known as "the Buddha") and his quest to understand why there is so much suffering in the world.

Begin the video and watch the first 23 minutes of the film, starting with the first scene which tells the story of the Priest and the Goat. This story is an ancient Tibetan Buddhist tale which introduces their belief of reincarnation and the sacredness of all living creatures. After Lama Norbu receives a telegram announcing the news that his great teacher the Lama Dorje may have been reborn as an American boy in Seattle, the monks leave for America to meet him and his family. The monks tell Jesse's parents they believe him to be the reincarnation of Lama Dorje and they give them a book about the Buddha. The mother reads from the book during Jesse's bath of the miracle story which is sometimes told about the Buddha's birth.

Although they are skeptical, the boy's mother admits she likes the concept behind reincarnation – being born over and over again. The father does not seem so sure and makes the comment, "Yeah, but what if you come back as an ant? You might get squished." The mother says, "People can get squished, too," and the father seems to agree with that idea rather intensely.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video at that point and ask for first impressions. Then ask the participants about their beliefs in regard to reincarnation.

What do you think about this idea of reincarnation?

What do you think about the idea that people can be reincarnated as other creatures as well as human beings?

What might cause someone to be reincarnated as something other than a human being?

Rising Action

Play the Karma Game.

Introduce the activity by giving a little background information on the concept of karma by saying something like:

The idea of karma is central to both Buddhist and Hindu philosophy. Essentially, this means that karma describes the connection between a person's actions and the result – primarily the idea that "good" actions lead to rewards and "bad" actions lead to undesirable consequences. Or in other words, what we are is determined largely by what we thought, said and did in the past; while what we are thinking, saying, and doing now will impact our future.

The karma of past, present, and future events are connected by the law of cause and effect. Buddhists understand karma as a natural law. There is no higher instance, no judgement, no divine intervention, and no gods that steer man's destiny, but only the law of karma itself, which works on a global time frame. Deeds yield consequences either in the next second, in the next hour, day, month, year, decade, or possibly another lifetime.

Invite the participants to play the Karma game. Everyone should pick a spot to start on the giant game board and should be spaced out along the path (everyone does not start at the same place like most board games). If someone in your group has mobility concerns or shows some reservation to participate, you might ask them to read the cards for the group after each dice roll.

Have each participant roll one of the dice to determine who goes first. After the first person goes, the play continues in the order the participants stand on the path at the beginning of the game.

For each turn, a person rolls one of the two dice and moves ahead the number of spaces which corresponds to the roll. If the participant lands on a space with an "X," read one of the cards. The participant should follow the directions on the cards (for example, move ahead 3 spaces or back 2).

Continue play as long as time allows or at least as long as each participant gets a chance to move 3 times. How do they end up on the path? Are they in the same order in which they started? Who has moved up? Who has moved back? Ask the participants what they might imagine could happen if they were to continue the game for another two or three rounds. Where might they be then? Has anyone “won” and how might that be determined? Has anyone returned to the very place they started? How have their deeds and actions translated into the karma which they experienced? What other things can they think of which might cause them to move ahead or drop behind?

Plot Point

UU Karma.

Explain to the participants that as Unitarian Universalists, we also believe in the idea that actions have consequences. While we may or may not believe this karma continues beyond our present lifetime, we nonetheless believe that we do need to be conscious of how our actions may affect the future, other people and the interdependent web of all existence. Regardless of whether or not we believe in reincarnation and regardless of whether or not we believe in a higher power, we can still believe in a concept of justice whereby good deeds are rewarded with positive results and bad actions can lead to negative consequences (either for ourselves, others, or the planet).

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they believe could give them some good “karma.”

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can

then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you or another participant says these closing words:

Watch your thoughts, for they become words.
Watch your words, for they become actions.
Watch your actions, for they become habits.
Watch your habits, for they become character.
Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny.

(Source Unknown)

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #596 “Boundless Goodwill” (the Buddhist Metta Sutta) from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

for some more information on Buddhism’s notion of karma, see:

www.thebigview.com/buddhism/karma.html

<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/karma.htm>

<http://buddhism.kalachakranet.org/karma.html>

Note: Buddhism has many different forms just as Christianity does – and not all Buddhists believe in the miracle birth story of Siddhartha or the idea of his facing temptation as depicted in the movie Little Buddha. You may want to inform the participants that this philosophy is particular to Mahayana Buddhism which is practiced by Tibetan Buddhists.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

Ask the participants what they thought of the story about Siddhartha's birth. Are there any similarities to another miracle birth story they are familiar with?

Were they surprised by Siddhartha's ability to meditate despite all the distractions were thrown at him? Do these temptations he faced remind him of another religious figure who faced temptation away from his righteous path?

Which of the three children did they believe was the reincarnation of Llama Dorje? Were they surprised or disappointed to learn it was all three of them?

More Activities.

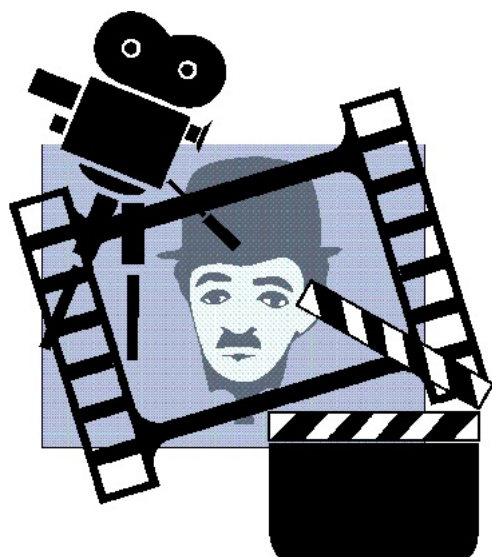
Lead the participants on a guided meditation, visualization or encourage them to meditate to the sound of music. (If you are not comfortable leading meditation, invite a minister or someone from your congregation who practices meditation to lead your group in meditating.)

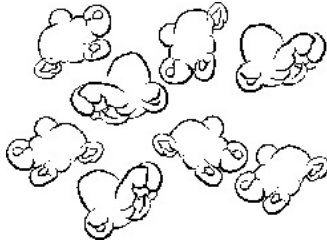
Invite a Buddhist monk or nun to visit your group and explain more about Buddhist thought.



Resource 5-A Cards for Karma Game

<p>Got a good grade on your History Final for all the hard work you did move ahead 3 spaces</p>	<p>Caught cheating on your math test go back 3 spaces</p>	<p>Disappointed a loved one when you didn't show up on time go back 1 space</p>
<p>Got in trouble for downloading illegal music from the internet go back 2 spaces</p>	<p>Had a big argument with your best friend go back 2 spaces</p>	<p>Did something around the house without being asked – or paid! go ahead 4 spaces</p>
<p>Sat with someone you don't know very well at lunchtime go ahead 2 spaces</p>	<p>Made a new friend go ahead 3 spaces</p>	<p>Got some exercise go ahead 1 space</p>
<p>Stood up for something you strongly believe in go ahead 5 spaces</p>	<p>Worked for social justice in the world go ahead 5 spaces</p>	<p>Did what's right, not what's popular go ahead 4 spaces</p>
<p>Lost an opportunity to point out an injustice and did nothing to make it right go back 4 spaces</p>	<p>Asked for help for a friend go ahead 2 spaces</p>	<p>Did something to end a relationship that was important to you go back 3 spaces</p>
<p>Refused to get involved when someone needed your help go back 3 spaces</p>	<p>Looked the other way go either 3 steps forward or go 2 steps back</p>	<p>Felt jealous and acted on those feelings go back 1 space</p>
<p>Were honest, even though you feared getting into trouble go ahead 5 spaces</p>	<p>Refused to participate in something you know is wrong go ahead 4 spaces</p>	<p>Participated in youth group's social action project go ahead 2 spaces</p>
<p>Did something selfish go back 2 spaces or ahead 3, if you apologize!</p>	<p>Took the easy way instead of the hard road stay right where you are</p>	<p>Did something unfair or mean to another person go back 3 spaces</p>





Unit Two

The Search for Truth

Session Six	True or False?
Session Seven	What Do I Want to Know?
Session Eight	Who's Got the Power?
Session Nine	What's a Soul Got to Do With It?
Session Ten	What Do I Take On Faith?





Session Six

True or False?

The objectives of this session are:

- to explore ideas about the “search for truth and meaning” which is at the heart of the Fourth Principle
- to consider the idea of truth as part of an individual’s perception
- to recognize our ideas about truth may change during a person’s lifetime
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- create the mystery box by placing the cardboard pieces into the large shoe box, dividing it into four sections; place the four small items inside with one in each of the sections; place the small Ziploc bag with the potpourri or cinnamon in one of the sections of the mystery box; cover securely

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- books with hidden pictures, optical illusions or stereograms (designs which become three dimensional after a person stares at them for a long time and their perception begins to change)
- a large shoe box or other cardboard box
- additional pieces of cardboard to divide the shoe box into four sections
- four small items of different textures and shapes (such as a ball, a bell, a feather and a sea shell) at least one of the items should make a sound or cause a rattle
- a small Ziploc bag with potpourri or cinnamon in it

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #11 “Eden,” or if using a VHS tape, cue it by finding the right scene approximately one hour and sixteen minutes into the program

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Optical Illusions. (5 min)
Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*. (25 min)
Rising Action: The Mystery Box. (10 min)
Plot Point: The Search for Truth. (10 min)
Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look at the books you have assembled with optical illusions, reverse picture illustrations, and stereograms (designs which become 3-D after a person stares at them for a long time and their perception begins to change).

After everyone has arrived and had a chance to look at the optical illusions, invite some reflection on the experience. Were they able to see the stereograms in 3-D? How did seeing the illusions and stereograms require a change in perspective?

Premiere

Watching Star Trek V: The Final Frontier.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, the crew of the Starship Enterprise truly go where no one has gone before. After their ship is hijacked by a radical Vulcan who claims to be on a mission from God, they are propelled past the Great Barrier which had previously been considered uncrossable. It is here that many believe is the Kingdom of Heaven – a place which may be the sacred dwelling place of the Divine.

Begin the video and watch scene #11 “Eden” – approximately one hour and sixteen minutes into the movie. In this scene, an Away team goes down to the surface of the planet to investigate. At first they are disappointed because there does not appear to be any life forms. Then the planet trembles and shakes as huge boulders are lifted up out of the ground and a booming voice greets them with a bright white light followed by an assortment of diverse images of deities.

The being who is perceived as God asks how they breached the barrier. When he learns they arrived via a starship, the “deity” asks: “Can this starship carry my wisdom beyond the great barrier?” While some of the people are willing to give the starship without question, Captain Kirk asks, “What does God need with a starship?”

The deity answers with energy pulses which strike out at Kirk like bolts of lightning “because he doubts him.” Spock is also struck with lightning when he repeats the question of why God would need a starship. Then Dr. McCoy – when asked if he also doubts – responds with, “I doubt any God who inflicts pain upon people for his own pleasure.”

The being admits that he has been trapped there for an eternity and that he intends to take their starship to be free. It is then that everyone

realizes this being is not God, but instead a very powerful life form who was imprisoned within the Great Barrier – and according to what they’ve seen of his actions thus far – probably not without good reason.

The Vulcan who brought them there based upon his vision is disillusioned, but even more so when the “deity” assumes his shape – as if to say his overinflated sense of self-importance led him and all the others there. He decides to challenge the being and as they struggle, Kirk has the distraction he needs to order the Enterprise to fire upon the evil being.

Stop the video after eighteen minutes has passed and as Kirk, Spock and McCoy hurry away while the Starship Enterprise fires.

Ask the participants about their experience in watching the video. Were they disappointed to discover the being in question was not truly a deity? Or did they expect it would turn out something like this? Have they ever experienced the sense of disappointment that something they truly believed in turned out to be false? What was that like? Ask anyone who is willing to share about the experience to reflect upon it for the group.

Share with the group the idea that the crew of the Starship Enterprise thought they had found Heaven and perhaps a deity who might be God. The Vulcan who brought them there was convinced he knew the truth.

Rising Action

The Mystery Box.

Bring out the mystery box and allow the participants examine it without opening it or reaching inside. They may shake it or smell it but not drop it or break it open. Encourage them to guess what is inside.

Then invite each person individually to stick their hand inside and feel – without looking. Purposefully (but casually, without being overly obvious) turn the box in various directions as the participants stick their hands in – so that different people are reaching into different sections and feeling different textures.

Ask the participants if they can tell what it is now that they had a chance to actually reach inside and touch the objects.

After the participants have made their guesses, open up the box and reveal the items in the various sections of the shoebox. Explain that just like attempting to determine the truth, different perspectives can cause different answers. Not everyone may have the same experience – and even those who do have the same experience may not perceive it in the same way.

Plot Point

The Search for Truth.

Remind the participants that in the movie they just watched, the characters were searching for what they believed to be God. As Unitarian Universalists, we are also searching – for the truth. We do not believe there is any one single Universal Truth or grand revelation. Instead, we believe that each of us must search for what is true and right – and that our ideas may change over time.

Ask the participants if their ideas about God and what happens after you die are the same as when they were younger. How might they have changed? Why might they have changed? What experiences in their life cause them to change their minds? Do they think their ideas might change as their life changes in the future?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in an activity known as “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about a something they know is true. It may be deep (such as “I know I can count on my friends to be there for me the times I really need them”) or not so deep (such as “I know the sun will set tonight.”) But it should be phrased as a positive, not a negative.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or some participants say these closing words in succession:

Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

– John 8:32

Say not, 'I have found the truth,' but rather, 'I have found a truth.'

– Kahlil Gibran (20th century poet and author)

The truth is rarely pure and never simple.

– Oscar Wilde, (19th century author) from *The Importance of Being Earnest*

When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.

– Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (19th century author), from *The Sign of Four* – a Sherlock Holmes novel

End the session with a unison reading from the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*, #657 “It Matters What We Believe.”



websites with optical illusions and stereograms:

<http://www.eyetricks.com/3dstereo.htm>

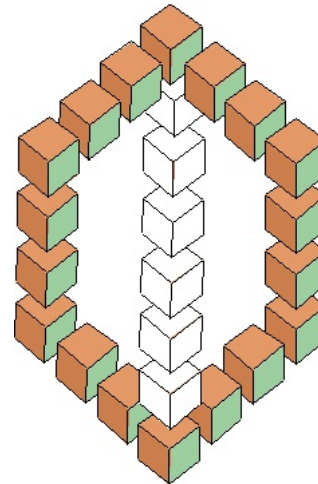
<http://www.michaelbach.de/ot/>

books with stereograms:

Magic Eye Gallery: A Showing Of 88 Images by N.E. Thing Enterprises and Magic Eye Inc.

Incredible 3D Stereograms Eye Tricks by Gary W. Priester and Gene Levine

Can You Believe Your Eyes? Over 250 Illusions and Other Visual Oddities by Block



Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

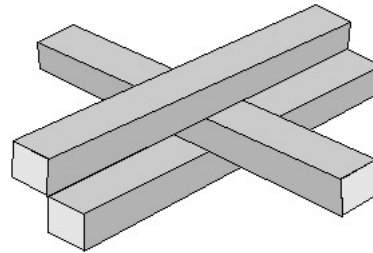
More Discussion.

Kirk says: “pain and guilt can't be taken away with a wave of a magic wand. They're the things we carry with us, the things that make us who we are. If we lose them, we lose ourselves. I don't want my pain taken away! I need my pain!” What do you think about these statements?

In this movie, Sybok’s followers are eager to join his quest because he is able to free them from their pain. At one point, the comment is made: “I feel as if a weight has been lifted from my heart.” Is their letting go of pain a denial of truth? Or is it simply a change of perspective?

More Activities.

Play some games which require using skills of memorization, such as: Concentration. Or, display a group of items on one theme, give the participants a few minutes to look them over and then remove the items. Encourage them to list as many of the items as they can remember. Then consider: how does memory affect perspective? How can the way we remember something make a difference in how we perceive truth?



Session Seven

What Do I Want to Know?

The objectives of this session are:

- to further explore ideas about the “search for truth and meaning” which is at the heart of the Fourth Principle
- to consider those big questions we all wonder about
- to learn how the Six Sources of our Living Tradition can help us find answers

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Oh, God!*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- representations of different images of the Divine: Earth mother statue, pictures of Jesus, artwork depicting image of God-the-Father, statute of Hindu god, etc.
- copies of Match It! worksheet (see Things to do ahead of time)
- simple prizes for identifying images in entering activity (optional)
- sheets of writing paper
- pencils and/or pens

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #18 “Divine Quiz” or if using a VHS tape, cue it by finding the right scene approximately one hour and seven minutes into the program
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- gather the representations of different images of the Divine

- create a Match It! worksheet by making a list of the religions the images are associated with, make one copy for each participant
- make copies of Resource 7-A (The Sources of Our Living Tradition)

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Match It! Activity. (5)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Oh God!* (25)

Rising Action: Snowball fight. (10)

Plot Point: Looking to the Sources. (10)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look at the images you have assembled. Invite them to take a worksheet and try to identify each image with the religion they are associated with. (If you have prizes available for the persons who end up matching the most correctly, mention this as it will make this activity more interesting for this age group.)

After everyone has arrived and had a chance to match up the images, encourage the participants to call out the answers from the Match It! sheet as you indicate the various images of the divine you brought in for display. After going through the entire list, ask if anyone got them all right. If not, ask if anyone missed only one, two, etc. Distribute prizes if you have them.

Premiere

Watching Oh, God!

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Oh, God!* Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the tape yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, an ordinary guy and supermarket manager – Jerry – is contacted by God and sent on a mission to spread his Word to the people. Of course, no one believes him – he doesn't even believe it himself at first. Eventually, a council of religious leaders ask him to “prove” he has been meeting with God by submitting a long list of questions for which he is supposed to obtain the answers – questions which they have decided Jerry could not possibly ever answer himself.

Begin the video and watch scene #18 “Divine Quiz” – approximately one hour and seven minutes into the movie. In this scene, the council presents their questions, then Jerry is left alone in a hotel room to wait for the appearance of God. God shows up in the guise of an elder, a grandfather figure dressed in the uniform of a person delivering room service. He goes over the questions with Jerry, joking about the exercise being a history final. He answers for Jerry (and us as the audience) the “big questions” of life such as the meaning of our existence, whether Jesus was his son and whether this world will come to an end. After answering all the questions, God leaves with the flip remark, “I hope I get an A.”

If you will not be watching the entire film, stop the video at that point and ask for first impressions. Were these the answers to the questions they wanted to hear? Were these good questions to ask? Encourage them to think about what they would want to ask if they were to have an audience with the Divine.

Rising Action

“Snowball Fight”.

Invite the participants to take the pencils or pens and to jot down one of their “big questions” on the sheets of paper. Everyone should write something, even if it is “I don’t know” or “I’m not sure.”

Encourage the participants to crumple their papers into a ball and have a “snowball fight” by throwing the papers around and at each other. Call time after a few minutes have passed and ask the participants to pick up the “snowball” closest to them.

Ask for volunteers to share what is written on the papers after they are opened up and uncrumpled.

Plot Point

Looking to the Sources.

Remind the participants that in the movie they just watched, God appeared to Jerry to answer some of the big questions of life.

Refer back to the images of the divine from the entering activity. Let the group know that many religions try to provide answers to some of these questions – and these answers can be found in the various sacred texts of these religious traditions.

Remind the participants that as Unitarian Universalists, we do not have one sacred text to which we can refer to for answers. Instead, we have our Six Sources – a myriad of places we can look as we seek to find the answers to our questions.

Encourage participants to read the Six Sources aloud with you (from the handout in Resource 7-A). Ask for feedback. What do these Sources say to them? Are there ones which are more meaningful than others? How might these Sources be used to find answers to our “big questions”?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they question or an answer they’ve discovered to a question they used to wonder about.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says these closing words:

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity.

– Albert Einstein

End the session with a unison reading from the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*, #657 “It Matters What We Believe.”

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

Jerry is at first unable to believe he was actually contacted by God and thinks it is some kind of joke. How might you react if you were contacted by a divine presence? What might make you believe it was real?

Once Jerry realizes this is not a joke, he sets out to accomplish his mission despite the disbelief of those around him and all the ridicule he faces. Have you ever stood up for something you believed in – even if it meant facing ridicule?

An ancient Chinese proverb states: “It is harder to ask the right questions than to find the right answers to the wrong questions.” Do you agree? How do the questions we ask reveal something about who we are?

More Activities.

Brainstorm a list of questions which might be used for your own test for God/Goddess/ Divine Presence/Great Spirit. What do they wonder about? What would they ask if they had an audience with the divine?

Invite a panel of ministers from various faith traditions to visit your youth group and explain how their religions answer some “big questions.”

At the time this curriculum was written, the remake for *Oh, God!* was in production. If the new movie has been released, consider showing parts of the new one in addition to the older one. Encourage the participants to compare the images of God in the two movies.

Resource 7-A
The Sources of Our Living Tradition

The Living Tradition which we share draws from many Sources:

Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;

Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.

Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.



Session Eight

Who's Got the Power?

The objectives of this session are:

- to explore ideas about the nature of the divine and the responsibilities of “running the world”
- to consider the concept of prayer and what might happen if we all had our prayers answered
- to discover how we can make our prayers come true for ourselves and others

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Bruce Almighty*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- copies of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles
- other sacred texts with prayers from world religions (see notation following session for ideas), including some examples of Unitarian Universalist prayers which can be found in the hymnal *Singing the Living Tradition*, the book *Rejoice Together: Prayers, Meditations and Other Readings for Family, Individual and Small-Group Worship*, and *For Praying Out Loud: Interfaith Prayers for Public Occasions* – (all available from the UUA bookstore)
- 2 small pieces of posterboard
- markers

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #13 “Bunch of Winners” or if using a videotape, cue it by finding the right scene approximately 58 minutes into the program

- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- create two signs for the continuum exercise; one sign should read “I have the power” and the other “I do not have the power”

Session Outline

Entering Activity: World Prayers. (5 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Bruce Almighty* (30 min)

Rising Action: Power Activity. (10 min)

Plot Point: UU Views of Prayer. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

Invite the participants to look over the sacred texts and world prayers you have assembled for them. Encourage them to review them to find anything relevant for them, any similarities between them or any unique qualities of the prayers which stand out for them.

After all participants have arrived and had a chance to look over the materials, invite some reflection. Did they find anything meaningful for them? What similarities did they find between the prayers? Is that surprising or not so surprising?

Premiere

Watching *Bruce Almighty*.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Bruce Almighty*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the

group. If not, introduce the tape yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, Bruce Almighty has become quite disillusioned with his life – and with God – because everything always seems to go wrong for him. He curses God for not listening to his requests and wonders why God has it out for him. As a result, God offers him the chance to be divine with the opportunity to “do better.” Bruce soon learns that being divine is a big responsibility and that everyone has their own troubles and prayers which need answering.

Begin the video and watch scenes #13 (Bunch of Winners), #14 (Falling From Grace) and #15 (Out of Control) for a 22 minute excerpt.

This sequence starts with Bruce and his girlfriend Grace at a fancy restaurant for dinner. He is beginning to become overwhelmed by the voices he hears in his head. He soon finds himself transported to the top of Mt. Everest for an audience with God who tells him the voices he’s hearing are the prayers of the people which are going unanswered. God tells him that he needs to start listening and doing something to help them or it will only get worse.

Bruce realizes he needs a way to organize the prayers in order to get the voices out of his head. First he tries a system of files in cabinets, but this takes up too much space. Then he tries Post-it notes but there are too many of those, also. Finally, he organizes them into computer files like email messages. He tries to answer the prayers which come in via the computer, but soon ends up with twice as many as he started with. He eventually decides to answer “yes” to all of them and says aloud, “There! Now Everybody’s Happy.”

In the next scene, Bruce attends a party where everyone seems to love him and showers him with attention. Everyone also seems to be happy because so many of their prayers have been answered. Meanwhile, Grace arrives at the party just as another woman begins coming on to him and kisses him. Grace is furious and tells him its over.

Bruce tries to make it up to her, and even tries to make her love him again, but as God warned him, he can’t overcome free will.

The people begin rioting in the streets because they are unhappy and miserable – even after Bruce-as-God answered their prayers. He is overwhelmed and asks God for help. He says, “There’s so many; I just gave them what they wanted!”

God answers, “Since when do they know what they want?” God explains that people keep wanting him to do everything for them, but what they don’t realize is they are the ones with the power. He tells Bruce that if he wants to see a miracle, then he needs to be the miracle. “That’s everybody’s problem,” God says. “You keep looking up.”

If you will not be watching the entire film, stop the video at that point and ask for first impressions. Then ask:

What happened? Why weren’t the people happy when they got their prayers answered?

What happens when someone’s prayer conflicts with someone else’s? (For example, both sports teams pray to win the big game.) Who gets their prayers answered then?

What did God mean when he said, “Be the Miracle?”

Rising Action

Power Activity.

Invite the participants to consider those things in their life which they have the power to change and those things which they may not have the personal power to change. For what might they need to request intervention – from a divine presence, parent, friend, etc?

Read off some items from the list in the resource at the end of this session and invite the participants to find a space along a continuum – standing in a place which signifies how much power they have in certain areas of their life. Designate the different ends of the spectrum by placing the signs you have made on opposite walls.

After each participant has found a spot along the continuum, invite some reflection as to why they are located where they are. Why do they feel they have power in this instance? Or why not? What might need to happen in order for them to gain power in various situations? How might they cope in situations over which they have little or no control? Would they ever find themselves engaging in prayer in the hope of a positive outcome in those cases where they have little or no power in the result?

Plot Point

UU Views of Prayer.

Encourage the participants to consider what relevancy prayer might have for Unitarian Universalists.

Remind them that not every Unitarian Universalist believes in a higher power (and even those who do may not necessarily believe answers to our prayers may be granted by that divine presence). Prayer has different meaning for different people in our faith tradition.

Prayers can even be considered a form of meditation for Unitarian Universalists, particularly spoken prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving rather than prayers as request for favors to be granted.

Share this quote with the participants:

The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays.

– Kierkegaard (19th century philosopher and theologian)

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they would change in the world if they had divine powers.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you or another participant says these closing words:

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.

– Reinhold Niebuhr (20th century Protestant theologian)

End the session with a unison reading of responsive reading #519 “Let me Pray” by Rabindranath Tagore from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Information about prayers for many religious traditions can be found on the web at:

<http://www.worldprayers.org/>

http://1stholistic.com/Prayer/hol_prayer_whatis.htm

http://1stholistic.com/Prayer/hol_prayer_HowToPray.htm

http://buddhistfaith.tripod.com/pureland_sangha/id41.html

http://www.geocities.com/quanyin_2000/buddha.htm

<http://www.jewfaq.org/prayref.htm>

http://www.indianchild.com/muslim_prayers.htm

some book resources on prayer:

1000 World Prayers by Marcus Braybrooke

Earth Prayers From around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth edited by Elizabeth Roberts

Life Prayers : From Around the World : 365 Prayers, Blessings, and Affirmations to Celebrate the Human Journey edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon

Rejoice Together: Prayers, Meditations and Other Readings for Family, Individual and Small-Group Worship edited by Helen Pickett

For Praying Out Loud: Interfaith Prayers for Public Occasions by L. Annie Foerster

Peace Prayers: Meditations, Affirmations, Invocations, Poems, and Prayers for Peace by Harper San Francisco Staff, Carrie Leadingham (Editor), Joann E. Moschella (Editor), Hilary M. Vartanian (Editor)

Prayers for Healing: 365 Blessings, Poems, & Meditations from Around the World edited by Larry Dossey

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas:

More Discussion.

At the beginning of the movie, Bruce is furious with God because of all the bad luck which he experiences. Have you ever felt like you were “cursed” with bad luck?

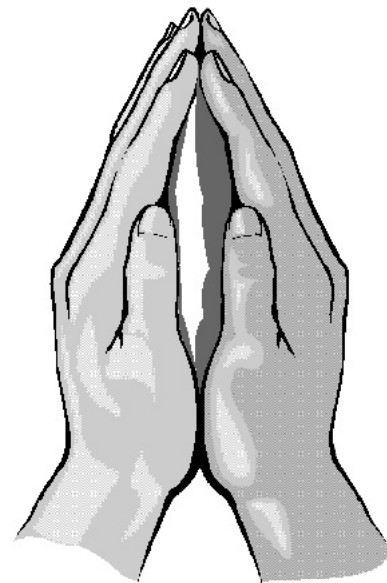
Did you notice any similarities between the image of God in this movie and the image of God in the movie, *Oh, God*? Did you notice any differences?

If you could be God for a few days or a week, what wrongs would you right? What changes would you make?

More Activities.

Invite the participants to create a skit (possibly in the form of a newscast) which shows what might happen if everyone’s prayers were answered. Or, encourage them to create a skit which shows what might happen if people were to exercise more of their own power to make things happen for them.

Present and lead the participants through one or more of the body prayers in Resource 8-B.



Resource 8-A

I've Got The Power ...

How much power do we have over the events and moments of our lives?

Pick a spot on the continuum based upon how much power you have in these areas of your life:

To make good things happen for me.

To keep myself healthy.

To live a long life.

To pick my friends.

To plan how I spend my time.

To make choices about my future.

To make others happy.

To make others angry.

To make my way in life as I see fit.

To have more "stuff" should I want it.

To have control over the good which happens to me.

To have control over the bad which happens to me.

To have control over what my friends do.

To have control over what my parents do.

To have control over what others do.

To have control over my reactions to what others do and say.

To create a miracle.

To be the miracle.

Resource 8-B Body Prayers

All the participants should gather around in a circle, then:

Bow (to honor the circle)
 Reach upward
 (to honor the heavens)
 Reach outward
 (as if to embrace all of the earth)
Turn toward the person on your left
 Bow to that person
 (to honor the divine spark within)
Turn toward the person on your right
 Bow to that person
 (to honor the divine spark within)
Turn toward the center of the circle again
 Bow to the center
 (to honor the circle)

I offer you peace
 (place hands together)
I offer you friendship
 (hands crossed, palms up)
I offer you love
 (hands crossed over heart)
I hear your needs
 (hands behind ears)
I see your beauty
 (hands over eyes, then move to open)
I feel your feelings
 (with arms crossed, hands on opposite shoulders)
My wisdom flows from a higher source
 (one hand up, one hand low, move both upward together)
I salute that source in you.
 (palms together as if praying)
Let us work and play together.
 (clasp hands together)

– Universal Greeting from the Gandhi Foundation

Stand with feet together and palms together in front of chest in prayer position
 Raise both arms over the head
 with palms facing upward
 Bend forward and down,
 touching palms or fingertips to the floor
Extend the left leg back and rest the knee on the floor, keeping your right knee bent and right knee flat on the floor (looks like lunge)
Bring the right leg back to join with the left leg
Lower the head and raise the buttocks, making a triangle with your body
 Gently drop both knees to the ground and slowly lower the rest of your body (looks like you are about to do a push-up)
Straighten the arms, arch back and lift head while keeping legs on the ground
 (Cobra position)
Now work backwards through the sequence:
 Lower head and chest, lift buttocks, making a triangle with your body
 Swing the right leg between the hands and lower the left knee to the floor (lunge)
Lower the head, raise the buttocks so bent at the waist with hands touching the floor
 Raise trunk and lift arms upward over the head
 Lower the hands and bring them palms together in front of the body in prayer position
 – Yoga Sun Salutation

for pictures of this sequence of poses, see this website:

<http://www.healthandyoga.com/html/news/surya.html>

Session Nine

What's a Soul Got to Do With It?

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider the idea of soul as the essence of a unique living being
- to recognize how ideas behind the concepts of soul relate to our First Principle (“inherent worth and dignity”)

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Heaven Can Wait*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- a variety of canned foods, with labels removed (ideally in a variety of sizes, such as tuna, soup, baked beans, etc)
- can openers
- access to a microwave (optional, if you have some canned food which requires heating)
- small plates or bowls to sample foods (optional)
- eating and serving utensils (optional)
- Sculpy, clay or Playdough

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #3 “The Escort” or cue the videotape to approximately eight minutes into the program
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)

Session Outline

Entering Activity: What's Inside? (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Heaven Can Wait* (20 min)

Rising Action and Plot Point: Creating Containers. (20 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look at the variety of unlabeled cans you have assembled. Encourage them to examine the cans to determine what is inside.

After everyone has arrived and had a chance to examine the variety of unmarked cans, encourage the participants to open them using the can openers. Were they correct? Were they able to guess what was inside based upon the shape and look of the outside? When were they wrong?

If desired, spoon out servings of the canned food (heat if necessary) and allow the participants to sample the food as you watch the video.

Premiere

Watching *Heaven Can Wait*.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Heaven Can Wait*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, the starting quarterback for the Los Angeles Rams finds himself in a way station where he is supposed to check in and begin his journey to his final destination – except he seems particularly reluctant to go along or cooperate with the process. When he discovers he is dead, he believes there is some mistake. And it turns out he’s right – but now his soul is without a body.

Begin the video and watch Scene #3 (The Escort), Scene #4 (Mr. Jordan), Scene #5 (Another Man’s Body) and Scene #6 (Temporary Arrangement).

In this sequence, Joe Pendleton is escorted through a cloud toward an airplane. He believes he is dreaming and refuses to stand in line or board the airplane. The escort explains that this is not a dream but in fact “a product of imagination” which is relevant particularly to Joe.

A supervisor arrives (Mr. Jordan) and wonders why Joe refuses to participate. He then asks for confirmation on Joe Pendleton’s arrival. The man at the airplane explains he should not have arrived until the year 2025. Then Mr. Jordan realizes the Escort took Joe out of his body even before the accident occurred. They acknowledge a mistake was made and Joe asks them to put him back in his body.

Unfortunately, they discover Joe’s body has already been cremated. They offer him another man’s body – the body of a man who is about to die. Since Joe wants to be another athlete, they show him several people who are about to die in athletic pursuits. Joe does not accept any of these, and Mr. Jordan begins to lose patience.

Then they arrive at the house of a very rich man who it just so happens to have made his wealth at the expense of others. Leo Farnsworth is hated and feared by just about everyone – and his wife and personal assistant have plotted to murder him.

A woman arrives and insists upon speaking with Leo Farnsworth. She is there seeking justice and to protest the building of a refinery in a town which will displace many people and endanger the health of others. Joe is moved by her plight and decides to help her by assuming Leo Farnsworth’s body – at least temporarily.

When his soul is placed in Leo Farnsworth’s body, Joe is surprised to see that from his perspective he still looks, sounds and acts like himself. Mr. Jordan assures him that inwardly he hasn’t changed, he’s still Joe Pendleton. Outwardly, though he’s now Leo Farnsworth and everyone else will see him that way.

Joe doesn’t seem to believe him, but eventually answers the servant knocking on the door. The servant responds to him just as if he was the other man. He leaves the room and when the servant asks him if he wants to dress, he says yes. He laughs because they seem to think he is Leo Farnsworth, and the servants laugh, too, in order to indulge him. Then a servant holds out some underwear for Joe to step into and Joe is a bit taken aback because he is not used to being dressed by a servant.

If you will not be watching the entire film, stop the video at this point and ask for thoughts and impressions. In particular, encourage them to explore the idea behind Mr. Jordan’s words that inwardly he is still the same person even though he is now in the body of another man. How is the “inside” or “soul” the true essence of a person? Do they think they would be the same if they were somehow transplanted into the body of another person? Why or why not?

Rising Action

Creating Containers.

Explain to the participants that some religious traditions believe the body is merely a container for the soul – which is the essence of the true person. Like when Joe entered the body of Leo Farnsworth, he was still the same unique individual, only in a different “container.”

Distribute the Sculpey, clay or Playdough and invite the participants to use the material to shape a container of some kind. Let them know their containers may be designed to hold anything they wish.

Plot Point

UU Concepts of Soul.

While the participants are creating their containers, expand the discussion of souls by saying something like:

According to many religious traditions, the soul is thought to incorporate the inner essence of each living being, and to be the true basis for sentience. Although ideas about the soul are often related to notions of the afterlife, opinions vary as to what may happen to the soul after the death of the body (even among similar religious traditions). However, whether or not a person believes the soul is a separate and distinct part of the body, the soul is still generally considered to be the true essence of a person while the outside is merely the container or packaging.

Do the participants believe in such a concept? If so, do they believe the soul lives on after the death of the body?

How does this idea of a unique soul relate to Unitarian Universalism's first Principle "the inherent worth and dignity of all people"? How does believing in a unique inner essence of a person make a difference in how we might interact with them?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, "Popcorn." For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they believe about a person's soul.

After the first "popper" has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also "pop" up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already "popped" can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then "pop." If no one already "popped" has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to "pop up" with a

comment of their own. This "popping" can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you or other participants say these closing words:

The soul is part and parcel of God,
is unchanging,
is indestructible
and is essentially indivisible.

– Bhagavad Gita (Hindu sacred text)

The soul of man should be likened
unto the sun, and all things on earth
should be regarded as his body.

– Bahá'u'lláh (founder and prophet of the Baha'i Faith)

The soul is the innermost aspect of man,
that which is of greatest value in him,
that by which he is most especially
in God's image.

– *Catechism of the Catholic Church*
published by the authority of Pope John Paul II

The soul is the intangible part
of an individual's existence.
It is "pure" at birth and has the potential
of growing and achieving nearness to God
if the person leads a righteous life.

– The Qur'an 66:8, 39:20

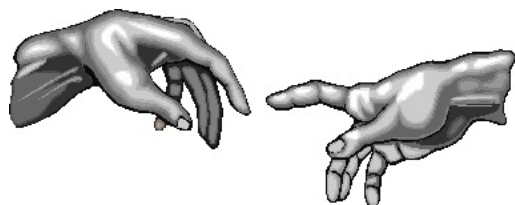
Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional discussion ideas:

Mr. Jordan eventually makes Joe leave the body of Leo Farnsworth because "it was not his destiny" to go to the Superbowl in that body. Do you believe in the concept of predetermined destiny? Why or why not?

Why do you think Joe did not retain his memory when placed in the body of the football player at the end? Do you think the essence of who he is was still maintained, even without his memories?

Mr. Jordan said: “The likelihood of one individual being right increases in direct proportion to the intensity with which others are trying to prove him wrong.” What does this mean to you?



Session Ten

What Do I Take on Faith?

The objectives of this session are:

- to understand the concept of faith as the belief in something without proof
- to explore the conflict between faith and science
- to consider the implications of the Fourth Principle, “the free and responsible search for truth and meaning”

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Contact*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- copy of the statements in Resource 10-A
- heavy cardstock
- double-sided tape or other adhesive to hang strips of cardstock
- a sheet or large piece of posterboard (optional, if you cannot post the cardstock directly on the wall)
- copy of the cards in Resource 10-B

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #19 “Decoding Message” or cue the videotape to approximately one hour and four minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- make a copy of the statements in Resource 10-A, cut them apart and adhere to cardstock to make long strips
- create two additional narrow strips labeled “Faith” and “Fact”

- post the “Faith” and “Fact” strips on a wall using double sided tape or other adhesive
- if you do not have a meeting space with a great deal of floor space, arrange to meet in an alternate location or to travel to a different place just for the Leap of Faith activity

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Faith or Fact? (5 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie *Contact*. (30 min)

Rising Action: Leaps of Faith. (10 min)

Plot Point: Our Own Leaps of Faith. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look over the statements on the strips of paper you have copied from Resource 12-A. Encourage them to place them on the wall under either “Faith” (if believing in this statement requires a person to take it on faith alone) or “Fact” (if believing in this statement relies upon provable scientific facts.

After everyone has arrived and had some chance to look over what the group is/has been doing, invite reflection. Was it easy to categorize all of the statements? Why or why not?

Premiere

Watching Contact.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Contact*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to

share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

This movie explores what might happen if and when the discovery is made that intelligent life does in fact exist outside of our planet Earth. As a team of scientists struggle to decipher the digital code which has been sent to Earth by the alien intelligence, questions are raised by some religious factions as to whether this is ethical and by the military arm of the United States government as to whether this is safe in terms of national security. Meanwhile, Dr. Ellie Arroway has to deal with the National Science Director who has been a rival of hers for many years and who had been trying to eliminate the funding for her project until she made this incredible discovery.

Begin the video and watch scene #19 (Decoding Message) followed by scene #20 (Facing the Crowd), scene #21 (Requiring Proof), #22 (Who Gets to Go?), #23 (The Candidates) and #24 (Worth a Human Life).

In this sequence, Ellie meets with Hayden who explains to her that the message sent from the alien intelligence must be read in three dimensions which is why their scientists haven't been able to decipher it. Then she takes this information to a meeting of important people at the White House. Drumlin tries to steal her thunder by explaining the documents are schematics for a machine.

The national security advisor is concerned that the machine might be some sort of weapon or even a "Trojan Horse" which would allow the aliens to transport to the Earth and attack them. Religious leaders are concerned about the theological implications of the communication and why scientists should be the ones in charge of this. Ellie wants to know what religion has to do with this debate.

Then, the late arrival of theologian and spiritual author Palmer Joss is a surprise to Ellie – not only because of their history of being lovers – but also because he says in effect they did indeed receive a voice from the sky so the religious implications are valid.

That night Ellie arrives at a reception and has to walk past a large group of religious

protestors. She is dismayed by their protesting and their reaction to this scientific discovery.

When Ellie runs into Palmer at the reception, they discuss his book and she quotes from it by saying, "the one thing people are hungry for is meaning, and that's the one thing that science can't give them." She tells him that its as if he is saying science killed God, but then asks: "What if science proved he never existed?"

She insists on continuing the conversation by asking him if he is familiar with the concept of "Achems Razor." When he doesn't appear to understand what that means, she explains that it is "the theory that all things being equal, the simplest answer is most likely." She wonders what is most likely – that a God created the universe and then provided no proof or that people created God in order to explain the mysteries they did not understand?

Palmer says that he couldn't imagine living in a world where God didn't exist, but Ellie says she would need proof. Then Palmer asks if she loved her father, to which she answers "yes." To this he answers, "Prove it."

Ellie is thrown off because of course she can't prove that she loved her father – not really in measurable scientific terms like she was requiring he offer up in regard to his belief in God. However, she is prevented from having to answer because both of their beepers go off.

Both Ellie and Palmer learn that the schematics for the machine are for a transport which can be used to carry a human being through space to meet the extraterrestrial intelligent life which sent the digital images to Earth. Soon it is revealed that the United States government will build the machine and has put together a selection committee to decide who will get to go on the transport. Ellie discovers that Palmer is on the selection committee and that her rival Drumlin is a fellow candidate like her.

A series of new reports follows in the next sequence. Larry King asks the question "On what basis do you choose a person to represent humanity?" Later, in an interview with Bryant Gumbel as Palmer watches, Ellie is asked whether she thinks it is a dangerous mission. She answers that she "has to believe that an intelligence that far advanced knows what it is doing." She adds that

all it requires is a little ...” However, when she pauses, Gumbel adds “faith?” She replies that she was going to say “a sense of adventure.”

Then after the top candidate drops out because his family does not want him to go, Ellie becomes the top choice. Palmer asks her to meet with him. He asks her about the physics of the machine and how a person can get back after traveling across the universe. Ellie says that she understands the risks and that she might not come back. He wants to know why she is willing to risk dying for this mission. She explains that as long as she can remember she has been searching for meaning about why we are here.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video after Ellie and Palmer embrace and kiss. Begin a discussion by asking for first impressions of the sequence just watched. Then invite further discussion by asking the participants questions such as:

What might happen were we to discover intelligent life somewhere else in the universe?

Would there be a conflict between religion and this scientific discovery? Why?

Why are some people willing to accept things on faith, while others require proof?

If you will not be watching the entire movie, let the participants know that Ellie is eventually selected to go after an initial mishap and although she travels across the galaxy, when she returns she has no proof of her experience. Since everyone else perceived her as never having left and the only passage of time was a few seconds, she is placed in the difficult situation of asking them to believe what she experienced on faith alone. Then further the discussion by asking questions like:

Have you ever been in a position where you felt the need to explain to a person why you believed something on faith alone?

What does it mean to have to take a “leap of faith?” Have you ever taken one?

Rising Action

Leap of Faith.

Note: For this activity, you will need a large open space. If your group does not normally meet in a room which will accommodate this activity, then you may need to find another space for this. This activity may also need to be adapted if you have anyone with mobility concerns. One way to do this is to have everyone scoot on chairs through the activity or ask for a volunteer to do the “leaping” while the rest of the group gathers around in a circle deciding together whether the person goes forward, backward, or stays in the same place.

Start this activity with everyone in the center of a large, open space (either standing or sitting as you have predetermined). Explain to the participants that you will read some situations off to them and in response they will move forward if they believe in the statement which requires a “leap of faith,” or move backward if they feel they would need scientific proof to believe it. Then read through the situations from Resource 12-B one by one, giving them time to think about the situation and make a move. Continue as long as time allows, then take a few minutes to invite comments on the locations of some of the participants. Who has moved the farthest? In which direction? Who moved the least? Why? What might have made them move differently?

Plot Point

Our Own Leaps of Faith.

As Unitarian Universalists, what are the leaps of faith which we take? Do we require proof of all that we believe? How might our “leaps of faith” be different from those of other religious traditions? How might our own leaps of faith be different from other Unitarian Universalists? How does the Fourth Principle “the free and responsible search for truth and meaning” affect our notion of faith?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they believe on faith.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you or another participant says these closing words:

Faith is taking the first step even when
you don't see the whole staircase.
(Martin Luther King, Jr.)

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #654 “Impassioned Clay” from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional discussion ideas:

Why did it matter to the selection committee whether or not Ellie believed in God? Have you ever been in a situation where your beliefs were called into question? Did this change the behavior of others toward you?

It is clear at the end of the movie that Josh believes what Ellie experienced is true. Do you think that she is also more able to understand why he has such faith in God’s existence?

How might the early loss of both her parents contribute to Ellie’s beliefs about faith and scientific fact? Compare this to how Mary longed to become an “angel” after her father’s death (from the movie, *Saved!*) What moments in your life have shaped your ideas about faith?



Resource 10-A

Faith or Fact?

Human nature is basically good.

There is intelligent life elsewhere in the universe.

God created the Heavens and the Earth.

The universe was created by a Big Bang.

The universe is expanding at a steady rate.

Humans evolved from a common ancestor of apes and chimpanzees.

World Peace is possible for us to achieve.

There is something greater than we are, a divine presence who may or may not govern human affairs.

The Grand Canyon was created through erosion.

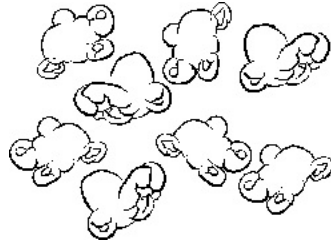
Dinosaurs and humans did not live on the Earth at the same time.

Matter is composed of atoms which are smaller than the naked eye can see.

Resource 10-B Leap of Faith

Which of these statements requiring a leap of faith do you believe in?

I believe there is intelligent life somewhere else in the universe.	I believe those things we do in life come back to us through a sense of grand universal justice.
I believe its possible to have peace on Earth.	I believe love can change the world and make it a better place.
Matter is composed of atoms which are smaller than the naked eye can see.	There is a reason I am here on this Earth.
We have an obligation to work for peace and justice in the world.	I believe the world is constantly evolving and so are we.
I believe medical advances will someday extend the duration of human life.	I believe technological advances in the next century will change the basic way we live.
I believe there is something greater than us, a divine presence in the world.	I believe in the power of people to do what's right and good.



Unit Three

Working for a Peaceful, Fair World

Session Eleven	The Fear Factor
Session Twelve	Hope Against All Odds
Session Thirteen	Where's The Line?





Session Eleven

The Fear Factor

*Note: The movie used in this session, **Bowling for Columbine**, is not rated because it is a documentary film. It does include considerable graphic violence – however, as violence in American society is the focus of the film – this is probably unavoidable.*

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider the causes of violence in American society and culture
- to understand how the history of the United States has contributed to a culture of fear which is perpetuated by policy makers and the media
- to explore ways we can move past the fear and create a culture of respect with less violence

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Bowling for Columbine*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- newspapers (a variety of different sources are good; try to obtain more than just multiple copies of a local paper but also some national newspapers such as *USA Today*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc)
- large posterboard for the Scary Headline collage
- scissors
- adhesive, glue or tape
- computer with internet access (optional)
- print outs of websites with news, blogs or information which might inspire fear (gang activity on the rise, SARS epidemic, nuclear arms proliferation, effects of climate change, terrorist acts, crime rates, etc)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #13 “Scary Kids” or cue the videotape to approximately forty-one minutes in (when the sign for Columbine High school is visible and the voice-over says, “We may never know why they did it, but it’s a scary time to be a kid”)
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- locate websites with stories which might inspire fear (see a list at end of session) print out ahead of time or be ready to show the class during your time together

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Scary Headline Collage. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the documentary, *Bowling for Columbine*. (25 min)

Rising Action: The Fear Factor. (15 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to create a collage of headlines from the newspapers which could inspire fear in people. Encourage them to cut out headlines of stories which might be considered frightening or cause people to become afraid of others.

After everyone has arrived and had a few minutes to contribute to the collage, ask some participants to process the experience. Were there a lot of frightening headlines? Are they

similar, or do they provide readers with a large variety of things to be afraid of? Ask the participants if they regularly read newspapers or headlines. If not, where do they get their news? Do they learn about stuff on the internet? How much information on the internet can also inspire fear? (If you have access to a computer and the internet, try a quick search of some news on the internet – perhaps even relating to a recent event locally or nationally in order to see how much fear is out there. You might even use a search engine to type in “crime” or “terrorism” or “fear” to see what comes up.) If you will not have access to a computer during your session time, then visit some websites and do a search for headlines on the internet ahead of time to print out some of these stories.

Premiere

Watching Bowling for Columbine.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Bowling for Columbine*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this documentary, Michael Moore explores the problems of violence in American society. This exploration centers around the worst school shooting in American history which took place at Columbine High School in April 1999. On that morning, two boys went on a shooting spree killing 13 students and one teacher – and seriously injuring 21 others. Eventually, their terrorizing of the school ended when they killed themselves. Ever since then, people have been speculating about the causes of violence and in particular what drove these two middle class boys to such extremes.

Begin the video and watch scene #13 (Scary Kids) followed by scene #14 (Marilyn Manson), scene #15 (Was it the Bowling?), scene #16 (We're Number One), scene #17 (Brief History of America), scene #18 (Fear of Everything) and scene #19 (Fear of Black Men).

In this sequence, documentary film maker Michael Moore describes the aftermath of the Columbine shootings when our nation began seeing threats in every school yard and every youth and even young children were considered potential time bombs ready to go off at any moment. He says “It’s a scary time to be a kid” and reveals the security checkpoints at schools, talks about zero tolerance weapons policies which caused an elementary school student to be sent home for pointing a gun made out of folded paper at another student. All children were to be feared since we don’t know who will be violent.

Moore presents the idea that some people blamed shock rocker Marilyn Manson because the boys at Columbine who went on the killing spree liked to listen to his music with violent lyrics. When Moore interviews Marilyn Manson, the rocker describes his music as an escape and believes he is merely a scapegoat when the violent acts of the American government in the world are overlooked.

Moore sarcastically considers whether bowling had anything to do with the killing, since the boys liked to bowl as well as listen to Marilyn Manson’s music and play violent computer games. (Bowling is also used here as a metaphor for falling bodies during acts of violent destruction; gun violence can knock down a group of people as easily as a bowling ball knocks down a row of pins.)

Moore presents the idea that although many youth and adults in other countries listen to violent music and play violent computer games, people in America commit far more incidences of killing with guns (and he gives some pretty shocking statistics to back this up). He wonders why this is so, then turns to history for some answers.

A Brief History of America is presented in cartoon form, showing how fear has shaped the rise and development of American culture. Then Moore goes on to explore how this fear continues even today, perpetuated by politicians and the media. He goes on to say that the American culture of fear is particularly focused upon the problems caused by racism. As he walks around the corner of south central LA where the LA riots occurred in the early 1990s, he considers the

phenomenon of how – although crime rates have actually decreased in recent years – Americans are actually more fearful of being the victims of some violent crime. Then it becomes clear that from their position in south central LA, they should be able to see the Hollywood sign but can't because of the smog. Moore presents the idea that this problem with smog should actually be more of a concern than the idea a person could be violently attacked.

If you will not be watching the entire documentary, stop the video after Moore says "because of the pollution which is far more dangerous than the stuff we're told to be afraid of."

Begin a discussion by asking for first impressions of the sequence just watched. Then, ask the participants if they agree with the ideas Moore raised in the video. Is the American culture a culture of fear? What is everyone so afraid of? Are these fears justified? Do they agree with Michael Moore who believes that these irrational fears create the climate which causes violent acts? What recent events in the world or the local community have inspired fear? Are these realistic?

Rising Action

The Fear Factor.

Invite the participants to engage in a game of Fear Factor. (Your group may or may not be familiar with a reality TV show of that name which provides contestants with challenges in where they must overcome something fearful.) For this activity, break the participants into groups of three or four and encourage them to take one of the headlines from their Scary Headline Collage (or other recent event which could inspire fear) and create a short skit, rap, cheer or mural which exaggerates the perpetuation of fear around the event. How can they make it sound or seem as fearful as possible?

After the groups have a chance to work on their project for ten minutes, encourage them to present it to the group as a whole. Ask for feedback on the presentations. What was this experience like? Did this exaggeration of the fear make it seem worse, or show how perpetuating fear can cause people to act in violent ways? How can we as Unitarian Universalists with a belief in "the inherent worth and dignity of all people" help to

stop this perpetuation of fear which can lead to violence?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, "Popcorn." For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something he or she can do to challenge the culture of fear.

After the first "popper" has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also "pop" up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already "popped" can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then "pop." If no one already "popped" has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to "pop up" with a comment of their own. This "popping" can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

Fear is the main source of superstition,
and one of the main sources of cruelty.
To conquer fear is the beginning of wisdom.
– Bertrand Russell

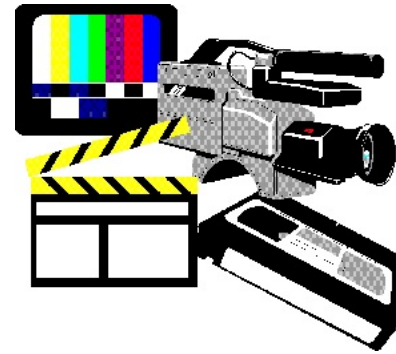
End the session with a reading of this Buddhist Prayer on Fear:

May all beings everywhere plagued
with sufferings of body and mind
quickly be freed from their illnesses.
May those frightened cease to be afraid,
and may those bound be free.
May the powerless find power,
and may people think of befriending
one another.
– The Buddha

Taking It One Step Further:

If you will be using this program as part of an extended learning experience such as a movie night or overnight, more activities, discussion questions and even additional lesson plans for teaching with the documentary *Bowling for Columbine* can be found at this website:

<http://www.bowlingforcolumbine.com>



some news websites with current event headlines can be found at:

<http://www.cnn.com/>

<http://www.foxnews.com/>

<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/>

<http://abcnews.go.com/>

<http://www.cbsnews.com/>

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/>

<http://www.nytimes.com/>

<http://www.usatoday.com/>

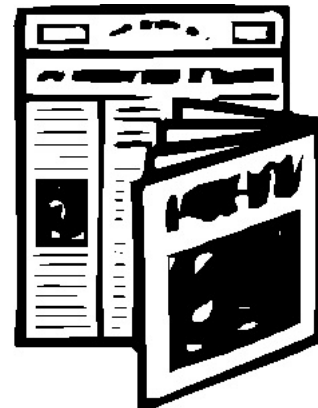
in addition, some “fear inspiring” ideas can be found at these websites:

<http://www.crimelibrary.com/>

<http://www.crime.org/do/Home>

<http://www.terrorism.com/>

<http://www.fas.org/irp/threat/terror.htm>



Session Twelve

Hope Against All Odds

*Note: The movie used in this session, **Hotel Rwanda**, is rated PG-13 for violence, disturbing images and brief strong language. However, as the subject matter of the video is genocide, this is understandably unavoidable.*

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider how hope and courage are necessary during times of great suffering
- to understand how indifference and inaction can lead to injustice
- to explore ways we can help realize our sixth Principle – to “promote peace, liberty and justice for all”

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Hotel Rwanda*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- playing cards
- five dice and a cup
- newsprint
- markers
- colorful dot stickers
- computer with internet access (optional) or alternatively, printed information from websites detailing countries or regions where genocide is occurring and/or copies of Amnesty International’s magazine

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #13 “Buying Time, Nothing Else” or if using a videotape, cue it to approximately 57 minutes into the movie

- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- locate websites with information on genocide to print out ahead of time or show the class during your time together (see some suggestions at the end of this session plan)

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Card and dice games. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Hotel Rwanda*. (25 min)

Rising Action: Planning Social Justice project. (15 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to play cards (simple games like Rummy or Hearts) or play a few rounds of *Yahtzee* with the dice.

After everyone has arrived and had a few minutes to play, ask the participants how fair that was. Did everyone have the same “odds”? What if someone got cards which weren’t as good as another person’s? What then? Did someone seem to keep having better dice rolls than others? Are these games “fair” or “just”? Why or why not? Did the people with the lousy cards or poor dice rolls get discouraged and “lose hope”? Or did they keep trying and have faith they will do better next time? How did it feel for the people who got good cards or favorable dice rolls? Was this empowering? Did they do anything to help out the people who didn’t get such good cards or dice rolls? Why or why not?

Premiere

Watching Hotel Rwanda.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Hotel Rwanda*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, we see the true story of one man and his courage to make a stand against genocide during the 1994 Rwandan conflict. As the country of Rwanda descends into chaos, hotel manager Paul Rusesabagina tries to protect his family and his wife (who are Tutsis) from the violence and the killing by the Hutu government. But when he discovers that the world will not intervene in the massacre of these people, he courageously opens his hotel to over 1,200 refugees who have been deserted by Western governments and left to be slaughtered. Using only his wits and his words he manages to keep them all alive for another day while they hope for some intervention.

Begin the video and watch scene #13 (Buying Time, Nothing Else) followed by scene #14 (Forever Four Stars), scene #15 (Halfway There Already), and part of scene #16 (On the Road of Death).

In this sequence, Paul's wife begs him to take the children and go, but he refuses to leave her behind. Soldiers arrive and insist that all refugees must leave the hotel, but Paul stalls them with the offer of some bribes. Then he makes a phone call to the president of the company which owns the hotel franchise in Belgium to say goodbye and thank them for all they have done for him and his family over the years. The white business owners in Belgium are flabbergasted over the idea that they have been left there to be slaughtered and offer to make some phone calls.

The leader of the soldiers is angry when he receives the call to leave the people at the hotel alone. He vows to remember Paul and what he did to intervene before ordering the soldiers to move away from the hotel. Paul is relieved, but soon

learns that the president of the hotel tried to get some of the Western governments to intervene, but they are refusing to do so.

Paul addresses the group of refugees at the hotel and tells them they have been abandoned, and they must do whatever they can to save themselves. He encourages them to make phone calls to anyone they know, and to shame them into doing something to stop the genocide.

Meanwhile, Paul meets with a general in the Hutu army. They have been friends for some time prior to the start of the chaos, and the general still has much respect for Paul. Paul encourages the general to "protect Belgium property" and not let anything happen to the hotel (and thereby encouraging him to not do anything about all the people hiding at the hotel as well). He also fabricates a story about how Western spies and satellites will be monitoring his actions and will judge him accordingly.

Paul visits the camp of a Hutu leader, George, who was another friend of his prior to the start of the civil war. He is in need of supplies for the people at the hotel. The Hutu leader calls the people cockroaches and tells Paul they will soon all be dead. Paul asks him, "You can't possibly believe you can kill them all?" But George responds, "We are already halfway there."

George gives him some rice and other food supplies, then offers him the chance to turn in some refugees in order to save the lives of others. He says that if Paul will turn over the ones who are "traitors" to the Hutu government, he promises to let the others leave. Then as he goes to leave, George encourages them to take the river road because it is clear (meaning there are no soldiers and no danger for them to face in returning to the hotel).

As the car makes the way along the river road, it suddenly becomes very bumpy and Paul fears the driver will end up putting them right off the road and into the river. The fog clears somewhat and they witness that the bumps in the road are not from muddy ruts but bodies of thousands of slaughtered Tutsis. Paul is sickened by the sight and climbs back in the car instructing the driver to go backward and "tell no one what we have seen here today."

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video after Paul tells the driver not to say anything about what they have seen.

Begin a discussion by asking for first impressions of the sequence just watched. Then, ask the participants about the courage they witnessed in the movie. Several times Paul puts himself at risk to save the refugees at the hotel. What gives him the courage to do this? How do the people abandoned at the hotel keep their hope and maintain their faith that they will be rescued? Why didn't Paul want the others to know what they saw?

Encourage the participants to consider what would happen if they found themselves in a similar situation— would they be able to summon the courage and the hope that these people did to survive the ordeal? What gives them hope and courage when life seems to be handing out its worst injustices?

Rising Action

Planning Social Justice Project.

Remind the participants that as Unitarian Universalists, we believe in “the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all” (our Sixth Principle). How can we reconcile this belief with what is happening in the world? What can we do to make a difference, speak out and do something about this injustice?

Using a computer with access to the internet (or print outs from websites located earlier) and/or copies of magazines from *Amnesty International*, investigate incidents of genocide which are happening in the world today.

With newsprint and markers, brainstorm ideas for a social justice project designed to raise awareness and call attention to the tragedy of genocide. Once a list of ideas has been brainstormed, go back over each idea and talk about logistics. Which ideas can most realistically be done by this group in a reasonable time frame? Which ideas does the group have the most enthusiasm for? Pass out the dot stickers and have the participants vote for two of the ideas they like the most on the list. The idea or ideas which receive the most votes can then be acted upon by the group.

Once the group has decided which social justice project(s) they will be doing, explore more logistics. What needs to happen first? How can this be arranged? What supplies are needed? Who needs to be responsible for what? What follow up is needed? Who will be responsible for that?

Write up the plan on another sheet of newsprint, placing names beside each task for who is to be responsible for gathering supplies, contacting someone, etc.

Note: *If the project which is planned will take place at another date and time, be sure to remind participants of their responsibilities ahead of time via email or postcards sent to their homes.*

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something he or she feels hopeful about.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul.
And sings the tune
Without the words,
and never stops at all.

– Emily Dickinson

End the session with a reading of this Hindu Prayer on Hope:

Let me not wander in vain.
Let me not labor in vain.
Let me not mingle with the prejudiced.
Let me not leave the company of the virtuous.
Let me not fly into anger.
Let me not stray off the path of goodness.
Let me not seek for this day or for the morrow.
Give me such a wealth, O Almighty!
— Pattinattar (10th century poet)

more information on Rwanda, Darfur, and genocide can be found at the following websites:

http://www.amnestyusa.org/magazine/fall_2006/

<http://www.darfurgenocide.org/>

<http://www.genocidewatch.org/>

<http://www.preventgenocide.org/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/evil/>

<http://www.genocide.org/>

<http://www.genocideintervention.net/index.php>

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional discussion ideas:

What finally motivated Paul to take action when at first all he wanted to do was get by and “not make waves”? Have you ever been in a situation where you were initially reluctant to do something, then were pushed to the point where

you could no longer put up with (or watch) the injustice? How did that work out?

Paul used his skills as a businessman to keep the refugees alive in the hotel. What skills do you have as resources to help yourself or other in a time of crisis?

Were you surprised to see all the Westerners leave, knowing the Tutsis were probably going to be slaughtered? Did they have any other options? What might they have been?



Session Thirteen

Where's the Line?

The movie featured in this session, Jurassic Park is rated PG-13 for intense science fiction terror and has multiple scenes where children are in physical jeopardy. This should be taken into consideration if you decide to show the entire movie rather than just an excerpt.

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider ethical implications of scientific advancements
- to explore what role religion has in the making of policies and laws dealing with ethics
- to understand how ethical decisions are made

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Jurassic Park*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- articles on scientific advancements in the recent news

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #6 “Mr. DNA” or cue the videotape to approximately 23 minutes into the movie when the group arrives at the Visitors Center
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- gather information on recent scientific advancements in the news (cloning, stem cell research, etc) which may impact your discussion from newspapers, magazines and the internet

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Scientific Advancements in the News. (5 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Jurassic Park*. (25 min)

Rising Action: Stranded Island activity. (20 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look over some of the magazine articles, newspaper headlines or articles you have printed off the internet with information on recent scientific advancements which may raise ethical questions.

After everyone has arrived and had at least a few minutes to look them over, gather the group together to watch the video.

Premiere

Watching Jurassic Park.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Jurassic Park*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the tape yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, a group of experts in the field of paleontology are invited to an island where a unique theme park has been created. They are there to evaluate the park before its official opening. When they arrive, they soon discover the theme park has authentic dinosaurs cloned from DNA – not animatronics as found in most theme parks. Although they are at first thrilled by the discovery and to see their life's

work brought to life – they soon began to wonder whether this was all a really a good idea – or a disaster just waiting to happen.

Begin the video and watch scene #6 (Mr. DNA) followed by scene #7 (Lunch Time).

In this sequence, the group of visiting scientists settle into seats of a small auditorium to watch a Disney-style movie on DNA. The seats begin to move like a theater ride at a theme park and the group witnesses scientists working behind the scenes to retrieve the DNA, clone it and care for the hatching eggs. Dr. Grant is overcome by the need to see the work up close and the scientists work together to loosen the seat restraints so they can get up and go into the lab.

Inside the lab they are amazed by the sights there, including witnessing the hatching of a new infant dinosaur from an egg. While Dr. Grant and Dr. Sattler appear to be thrilled by the discovery, Dr. Malcolm is concerned about the implications of what is happening. He warns them that “life will not be contained,” that “life finds a way.” He implies that even though all the dinosaurs are engineered to be female, it is still impossible to fully control their development, including their breeding.

Dr. Grant asks what the species is of the newly hatched dinosaur, and is shocked to discover that it is a Velociraptor. He is concerned now. “You bred Raptors?” he asks.

The next scene finds the group at the velociraptor pen as they witness a bull being lowered for them to feed upon. The violence with which the Velociraptors attack the bull is implied to be ferocious and deadly despite the fact that it is hidden from view beneath the cover of plant life.

Robert Muldoon (a wild life expert from Kenya) arrives and announces to the group of scientists that all the Velociraptors should be destroyed. He says they are lethal at 9 months. He also informs the group they are extremely intelligent and learn through experimentation.

Lunch is served for the group of scientists inside the visitors center as they discuss what they have seen. Now all of the scientists have misgivings about the project.

Malcolm expresses his concern that they are “wielding scientific power like kids with a gun.” He says they were “so preoccupied with whether or

not they could do this that they didn’t think about whether or not they should.”

Ellie Sattler echoes his thoughts by saying they are wild creatures out of their element who will defend themselves if necessary. Alan Grant voices his concern that “the world has changed so radically, we’re just running to catch up.”

John Hammond, the man who developed the park is flabbergasted that the scientists are so skeptical and not simply amazed by what they have accomplished. He wonders why the lawyer is the only one on his side. Then a man approaches to whisper in his ear. “Ah! They’ve arrived,” Hammond announces.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, pause the video when Hammond announces “They’ve arrived!” prior to the start of scene #8. You might explain to the group that Hammond’s grandchildren have arrived to accompany the scientists on the tour of the park and that things soon go horribly wrong. A power outage from a bad storm knocks out the electrical fence, and the scientists and children are stranded in the middle of the park with dinosaurs who are free to roam and wreak havoc.

Ask the group for first impressions of what they witnessed. Although the film is fictional, and there are some stretches in regard to the possibility of creating dinosaurs by extracting their DNA from mosquitos – the fact remains: what if we were able to do such a thing? Should we? What are the ethical implications of bringing to life such creatures for our enjoyment?

Talk about some recent scientific advancements in the area of cloning and the controversies surrounding them. Is the process of cloning ethical? Where is the line? When is it good, and when isn’t it? If it’s not appropriate to clone human beings, is it appropriate to clone organs from stem cells? Should fetuses be genetically altered to eliminate disabilities and diseases? Again, where is the line to be drawn? How does religion enter into the debate? Can decisions about ethical issues be made without religion entering into the discussion?

Remind the group of Dr. Grant’s words:

The world has changed so radically and we’re just running to catch up.

Science is moving more rapidly than our laws and policies. We need to determine what is ethical even as new possibilities exist all of the time. How can we possibly keep up? And how can religion be part of the discussion when so many diverse religious traditions are available to draw from?

Rising Action

Stranded Island activity.

_____ Break the participants into small groups if you have more than six. Then explain the scenario for this activity: _____

A group of ten people are stranded on an island after boarding a lifeboat and managing to drift there after 4 days at sea. There is only enough food left for five of those people if the food is to last for another 7 days while the group hopes to be rescued. The task for the group is to decide who will get food for the next 7 days and who will not. Those people who do not get food risk dying or becoming so weak that they may never fully recover. Who gets the food, and how do you decide?

A woman who is six months pregnant
a medical doctor
an elderly person with engineering skills
a fourteen year old boy
a six year old girl
a police officer
a lawyer who defends civil rights
the Captain of the ship
a nurse
an airplane pilot

After fifteen minutes has passed, call “time.” Were they able to come to a conclusion? What was it? Was it based upon how much benefit the whole group received (or the world at large received) from the saving of the person? How was a person’s “value” to the group and the society at large determined? How might this same principle be applied to the ethical questions raised by some recent ethical advancements? What other possibilities are there for making these decisions?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they believe is ethical or is not ethical.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

Let me give you one definition of ethics: It is good to maintain life and to further life; it is bad to damage and destroy life. And this ethic, profound, universal, has the significance of a religion. It is religion.

– Albert Schweitzer (20th century theologian and philosopher)

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #657 “It Matters What We Believe” from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

Dr. Malcolm explains Chaos Theory as the idea that nature is ruled by unpredictability. Do you agree with this idea or not? What are some things in the world which seem to prove or disprove the Chaos Theory?

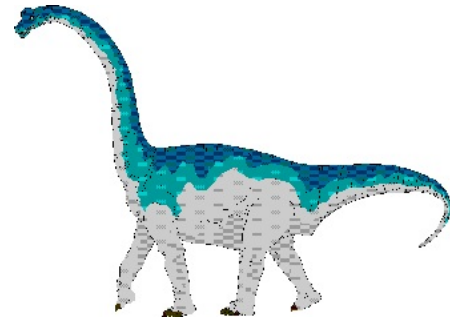
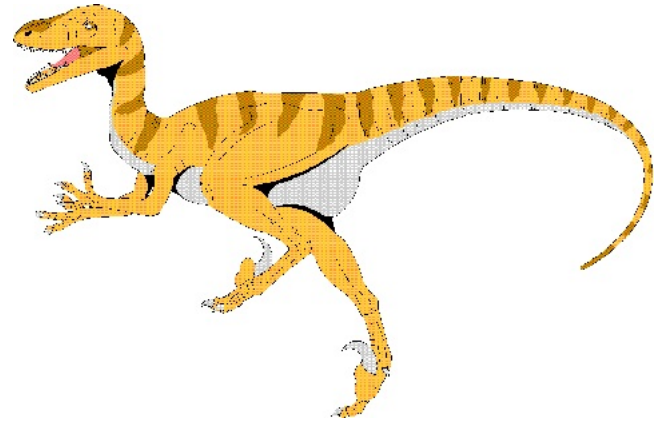
Dr. Malcolm also said that discovery is the “rape of the natural world.” Do you agree? How can discovery be made and scientific progress be accomplished without damaging the natural order? Is it possible?

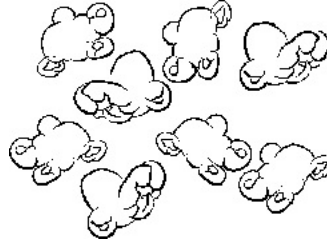
More Activities.

Engage the participants in a role play scenario. Assign half of the group as scientists who have just made an incredible scientific discovery, and the other half as religious leaders, politicians, environmentalists, etc, who have concerns about this discovery. How will the group work out their differences? Will they decide ultimately if it is ethical for the scientists to continue their research? Will there be limits on this research?

Choose from some of the scenarios below, or consider using something from the recent news:

- scientists discover a way of selecting the biological sex of a fetus
- scientists discover a way of eliminating the chromosomal abnormality which causes Down’s Syndrome
- scientists discover a way to transform the surface of the planet Mars to make it inhabitable by humans (without wearing space suits)





Unit Four

Acceptance of one Another ... And Ourselves

Session Fourteen Moving Beyond Assumptions

Session Fifteen No Doubt

Session Sixteen Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Session Seventeen Second Chances

Session Eighteen Where Dreams Come True





Session Fourteen

Moving Beyond Assumptions

*Note: The movie used in this session, **Dances with Wolves**, is rated PG-13 due to some graphic violence which is related to the subjects covered (Civil War, conflict between Native Americans and white settlers, war between rival Native American tribes) and a scene which includes implied sexual activity. It also lasts a full three hours. All of these factors should be considered if you are thinking of watching the entire movie instead of just an excerpt.*

The objectives of this session are:

- to understand the concept of radical hospitality (the practice of taking a risk by opening up oneself to those who are different)
- to explore our own personal biases and discover how we might overcome them in order to practice radical hospitality
- to consider the First Principle “the inherent worth and dignity of all people” in light of our personal biases and assumptions

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Dances with Wolves*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- copies of the pictures in Resource 14-A
- 9x12 pieces of colorful cardstock
- index cards
- pencils
- double-sided tape or adhesive
- large bowl

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #10

- “Official Introductions” or cue the videotape to approximately one hour and eight minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- make copies of the pictures in Resource 14-A and mount them on colored cardstock to create framed pictures which can be hung on the walls of the room
- make copies of the labels in Resource 14-B and cut into strips
- affix double-sided tape to the backs of the label strips so they can be mounted on the wall underneath or next to the pictures

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Labeling Activity. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Dances with Wolves* (25 min)

Rising Action: Discovering Personal Biases. (10 min)

Plot Point: Radical Hospitality. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look at the pictures of the people (copied from Resource 14-A) and hung up around the room. Encourage them to use the labels you have created from Resource 14-B to identify which picture corresponds with which personality trait(s). They can hang the labels below or next to the pictures on the walls. They are welcome to move the labels as necessary and as the group decides.

After everyone has arrived and had at least a few minutes to look at the pictures, make some conclusions based upon them, and either place or move one of the labels, ask for a brief processing of the experience.

Was this easy to do? Were they biased by the appearance of the people in the pictures as they selected the attributes which go along with them?

Explain that there are no right or wrong answers to this activity – only a need to challenge some of their assumptions. Why did they provide the labels to the pictures they did? What assumptions did they make in doing so? (For example, why did they assume the middle aged man in the suit was a conservative or didn't listen to heavy metal music? Why might he in fact like this kind of music or have different political beliefs?)

Remind the participants that we all have personal biases and stereotypes which enter into our heads because of the culture in which we were raised and because as children we often learn by categorizing things and people. Our challenge in this time of life is to learn that stereotypes are wrong because they are based upon assumptions which may not be accurate. As a result, we must learn ways to move beyond this bias and a tendency to categorize or “label” people based upon our assumptions.

Premiere

Watching Dances with Wolves.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Dances with Wolves*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the tape yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, Lt. John Dunbar is sent out to the Old West to protect a U.S. outpost on the desolate frontier just after the Civil War. When he discovers an injured woman who appears to be Caucasian like him (but looks and speaks like the Sioux people), he attempts to return her to them. The native people initially react with hostility toward his arrival in their village, but his act of

good will gains him some respect with the tribe's elders who have a special affection for the white woman who came to live with them as an orphan. Now they are attempting to overcome their cultural differences, biases and communication difficulties in order to develop an understanding between their two peoples.

Begin the video and watch scene #10 (Official Introductions) followed by scene #11 (Who Killed the Buffalo?).

In this sequence, a few Sioux arrive on horseback and offer John Dunbar a buffalo fur in gratitude for returning the woman to the tribe so she could be healed. Dunbar offers them food in return, but they do not appear to understand his offer.

After they leave, Dunbar reflects on his beliefs, saying, “Nothing I’ve been told about these people is correct.” He is beginning to understand the complexity of their culture and see them as something other than the “savages” he was taught to expect.

Dunbar is invited to the Sioux village and he is willing to be open to the strangeness which he sees around him in order to understand the people and their culture better. The woman which Dunbar had found injured in the prairie arrives to translate as she can remember a few words of the “white people” – the language she used to speak as a child.

Dunbar makes a point of stopping the conversation and asks to know the names of the Sioux present with him. (By wanting to know their names he is personalizing “the other” and trying to know “who they are.”)

In the next scene, Dunbar is awakened by charging buffalo. He immediately goes to the Sioux village to alert them. They are startled by his arrival in the middle of their festival and are initially hostile. However, once they understand that he has come to let them know he spotted some buffalo, they stop attacking him.

In the morning, Dunbar heads off with the Sioux in the direction he noticed the buffalo was heading. There is a noticeable change in their attitude toward him. He is accepted among the people and is respected.

Then the hunting party discovers that the buffalo have all been slaughtered. By the trail of wagon tracks which lead into the distance, it is clear they have been killed by whites like Dunbar. He is sickened by the lack of respect his people have shown for the Native Americans who rely on the buffalo for their survival.

He returns to the camp with them that evening but remains conflicted. He is sickened by what his own people have done, worsened by the fact that the Sioux are offering him hospitality despite the deeds of his people. He also is torn by his knowledge that more and more white settlers will soon be coming to the prairie and what this will mean for the people who are becoming his friends.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video after Dunbar's narrative voice says, "only the confusion of a people unable to predict the future."

Begin a discussion by asking for first impressions of the sequence just watched. Then, ask the participants:

How were Dunbar and the Sioux able to extend hospitality toward one another when they weren't sure they could trust each other?

How did their actions toward one another break down the barriers between their cultures and help them learn to trust?

Have you ever been in a situation where you took a risk in getting to know someone very different? How did that work out?

Have you ever felt conflicted or guilty over actions of "people like yourself"? What if anything did you do? What might you have done?

Rising Action

Discovering Personal Biases.

Remind the participants that John Dunbar arrived at his post with quite a few personal biases about the native people. Once he gets to know them, he soon discovers that these assumptions were incorrect.

Help the participants to understand that we all have our personal biases – no matter how open and tolerant we think we are of others. How about those people who have political beliefs which are radically different from ours? How about those people who are working actively in the world on issues we disagree with? Or those people who may believe in the same things we do but refuse to act upon those beliefs? How has our personal bias toward these people colored our reaction to them?

Distribute the index cards and encourage the participants to jot down some of their personal biases. Let them know they will not need to share these biases with the group. Encourage everyone to write something on their card.

After a few minutes have passed, invite the participants to tear up their cards into tiny pieces and toss them into a large bowl. Once all the pieces are tossed inside, mix up the pieces (or invite one of the participants to mix the fragments up really good).

Ask each participant to reach into the bowl with the mixed up fragments of the torn index cards. Encourage them to look at the torn piece and try to identify what was written by seeing only what is on the fragment. Can they tell the whole story by looking at just this one piece? Or would they merely be making an assumption based upon the small piece that they can see?

Ask the participants:

Have you ever been judged because someone made an assumption about you? What was that like?

How can we learn to overcome our personal assumptions and biases to accept people – all people – with inherent worth and dignity?

Plot Point

Radical Hospitality.

Explain to the participants that Unitarian Universalists believe in practicing what is known as “Radical Hospitality.” This is the deliberate effort to reach out to a person who is different – someone who may even be possibly hostile to us and our beliefs. It’s known as “radical” because it may go against our instinct to protect ourselves by aligning with those who think and feel and look the way we do. It’s known as “radical” because it can be risky, setting ourselves up for rejection (either by the person we are reaching out to or by others in our community who have negative beliefs and feelings about “the other.”) It is radical, but it is important if we are to make a difference and break down the barriers which keep people apart, destroy the stereotypes which perpetuate and to create a better, more peaceful world.

Remind the participants that John Dunbar did this when he insisted upon knowing the names of the people he was meeting with. By making the effort to learn and understand their names, he was making an initial effort to connect with the person inside – to personalize the “other.”

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about an assumption someone has made about them in the past.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to extinguish the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

To reach out to another who is different
is to risk exposing ourselves.

To stand up for what we believe in
is to risk that which we’ve gained.

To do what we know is right
is to risk everything we have

But to do nothing
is to risk that nothing will change.

– Michelle Richards

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #560 “Commitment” from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional discussion ideas:

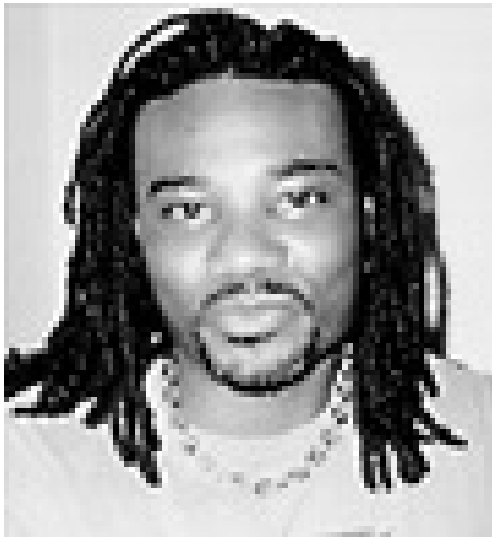
Were you surprised to discover that he eventually turns his back on his own people to become a Sioux warrior? Why did he (or why might he) do so? Even after he is captured and tortured by his people, he continues his loyalty to the Sioux even though it may mean his own death.

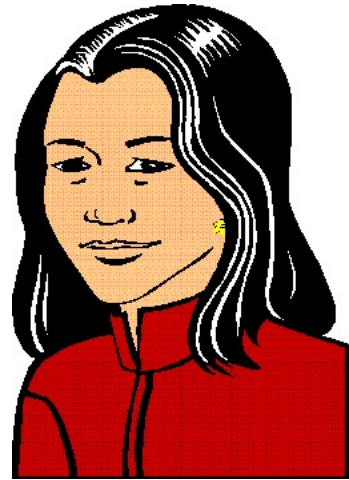
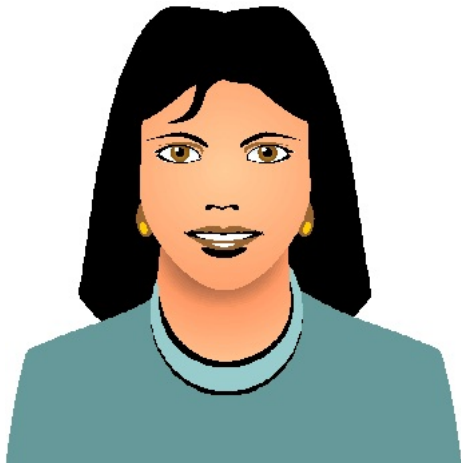
What does it mean when we refer to the “right of conscience” in the Fifth Principle? And how does this relate to the concept of democracy which is the other part of the Fifth Principle?

Do you know of any people who stood up for what they believed in – stood for their “right of conscience”? What did they do, and what did they have to withstand to follow their conscience?

Resource 14-A









Resource 14-B

This person is a doctor.

This person works in an office.

This person is a professional athlete.

This person is a college student.

This person listens to heavy metal music.

This person teaches at a university.

This person is a conservative.

This person is a liberal.

This person is very religious.

This person is an environmentalist.

This person is a florist.

This person is a musician.

This person listens to Hip-Hop music.

This person works in a restaurant.

This person serves in the military.

This person is an immigrant.

Session Fifteen

No Doubt

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider how doubt can be an obstacle to living life with purpose
- to explore ways which doubt holds us back from doing our best
- to realize ways we can overcome self doubt and how our Unitarian Universalist faith can sustain us in this endeavor

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Willow*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- a variety of items which can be used to create an obstacle course: boxes, chairs, tires, ropes, sheets, blankets, etc.
- blindfold (optional)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #10 “Madmardigan’s Promise” or cue the videotape to 34 minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- make copies of the pictures in Resource 15-A and post on the wall
- create an obstacle course which would require participants to climb over, under, around and through various objects

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Real Life Heroes. (5 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Willow*. (15 min)

Rising Action: Obstacle Course. (15 min)

Plot Point: Unitarian Universalist Doubt. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look over the pictures of the real life heroes you have assembled from Resource 15-A. Encourage them to silently identify as many of the images as they can and to reflect upon what these people have done to change the world.

After everyone has arrived and had at least a few minutes to look over the images, invite some reflection. What makes these people heroes?

Premiere

Watching Willow.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Willow*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, a young farmer named Willow Ufgood is drawn into a quest to save Elora Danan (a baby girl with an important destiny) from the evil queen Bavmorda who wants her destroyed. Willow and his friend Meegosh have been chosen to take the baby to the Great Crossroads where she can be handed over to a human so she can be taken care of properly and no longer bring trouble to the village of Nelwyns.

Begin the video and watch scene #10 (Madmardigan's Promise) followed by scene #11 (The Brownies), scene #12 (A Special Baby), and scene #13 (Willow's Decision).

In this sequence, Willow and his companion Meegosh come across a man imprisoned in a small cage. Madmardigan is apparently a great warrior and swordsman who has been imprisoned for reasons he will not explain. He promises to take care of the baby if they will only release him from the cage where he has been left to die. Despite his misgivings as to whether or not he can trust Madmardigan, Willow gives in because he misses his family and because he doubts his ability to do what must be done to protect Elora Danan.

Willow's companion Meegosh has no such misgivings. He frees the prisoner which allows both he and Willow to return home. Madmardigan takes the baby after Willow explains how she must be cared for and then heads off down the road.

As Willow and Meegosh head back home, he questions whether or not they did the right thing. Then a bird flies by carrying the baby they had just given to Madmardigan for safe keeping.

Willow and Meegosh are attacked by tiny arrows and are knocked unconscious. When they wake up, they are bound tightly with rope and taunted by a very tiny people known as the Brownies.

The Brownie Queen appears to tell them that they must free Willow and Meegosh. She then explains to Willow that he has been chosen to be Elora Danan's guardian. Willow protests that a "warrior is needed – he is nobody."

She tells him that he has been selected by Elora Danan herself and lets him know what he must do. She then gives him a special wand which he can use as part of his important mission.

Willow tells his friend to go home with a message for his family because he has decided he must go on this quest. Willow continues on with his journey to find the great sorcerer Fin Raziell who can help him protect the baby from the evil queen Bavmorda.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video as Willow and the Brownies arrive at a tavern to get more milk for Elora Danan.

Ask for first impressions of the video. Then, invite reflection on some questions like:

Why does Willow doubt himself when he has clearly been chosen for the quest?

How did Willow's doubt about himself endanger the baby he was supposed to protect?

How did he overcome this doubt and make his decision to complete the mission?

Have you ever felt doubt about your ability to do something you were obligated to do? Why? How did you overcome this?

What might have happened if the people we talked about earlier had given in to feelings of self-doubt? (See the notes on Real Life Heroes in Resource 15-B which details what might have caused them to doubt themselves.)

Rising Action

Obstacle Course.

Invite participants to volunteer for a chance to complete the obstacle course you have created for them – but they must do so with a limitation to make the challenge greater. Tell the participants they can go through the course without using their legs or keeping their arms at their sides, or with a blindfold.

After several participants have had a chance to go through the obstacle course with the added challenges, invite reflection on the experience. Was it hard to keep to the restriction? Why or why not? Did they doubt they would be able to complete the challenge? Why or why not? If they did experience some doubt, how did they overcome it?

Plot Point

Unitarian Universalist Doubt.

Many religions encourage their faithful to look to a divine presence for intervention when they are faced with self-doubt. How does Unitarian Universalism help us during times we may doubt ourselves?

Our beloved community of like-minded souls supports us during tough times, helping us deal with our self doubt. Perhaps also our belief in the First Principle – inherent worth and dignity of all persons – can give us emotional strength when we falter.

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about something they’ve doubted or something they’ve done to overcome self doubt.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

The whole problem with the world is that fools and fanatics are always so certain of themselves, but wiser people so full of doubts.

– Bertrand Russell, (British author, mathematician and philosopher)

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #519 “Let Me Not Pray to be Sheltered From Dangers” by Rabindranath Tagore from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

More Discussion.

In the opening sequence, Elora Danan’s mother gives away her child in order to protect her from the evil queen and the baby ends up floating down a river in a basket. Does this remind you of the story of another important baby who is saved by a basket floating in water? How does this symbolism show us early on just how important the baby Elora Danan is?

Willow doubts that he is the right person to protect Elora Danan, yet she chose him for the job. Why do you think she did? What skills or personality traits did she see in him that he did not? Have you ever felt “chosen” for something and not really understand why? Did you follow that path or choose to do something else?

Willow is not the only one in this story who is transformed by their quest. Both Madmardigan and the Princess undergo a metamorphosis almost as dramatic as Fin Raziels. Why do they transform themselves, and how does this make a difference in the outcome of the movie?

How does Willow ultimately defeat the evil queen? How did his new confidence in his abilities help him to trick her?

More Activities.

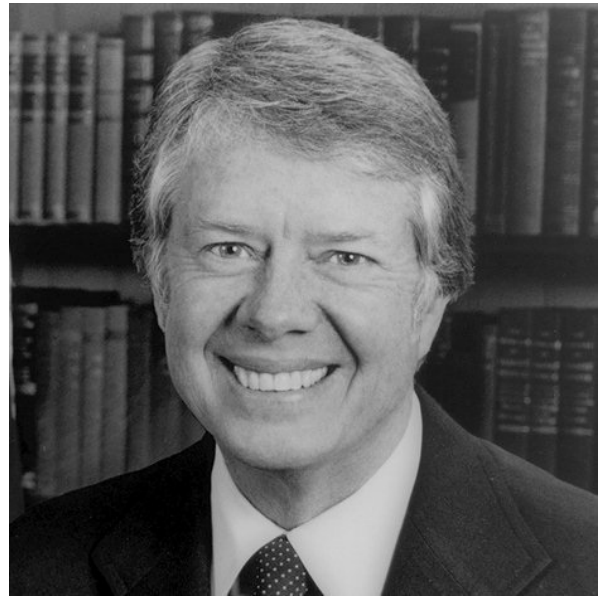
Arrange for the group to experience a physical challenge such as a ropes course or visit a place with a rock climbing wall.

Engage the participants in an Affirmation exercise known as “Angel Wash.” For this activity, participants line up in two lines facing one another. One participant moves slowly through the center of the lines while those in the line speak affirmations (“you are a wonderful person”) and “wash” the participants “aura” (no physical touching, only the space around the person). Once the person is at the end of the line, he or she joins the end of the line and the next person moves through. Participants may move through the line with their eyes closed if they are comfortable doing so.

Invite the participants to affirm one another in a community building activity. Tape an index card to everyone’s back. Then the participants mingle around the room, using pencils or markers to write affirmations on the index cards, comments such as “you say really important things” or “you are a good friend.” The key to this activity is that every participant must write something on everyone else’s card ... and it must be a positive – an Affirmation.



Resource 15-A
Real Life Heroes





Resource 15-B

Real Life Heroes Identified

Page One: (Left to Right, Top to Bottom) Mohandas Gandhi, Former President of the United States Jimmy Carter, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, jr., singer/songwriter Paul Hewson (Bono)

Page Two: (Left to Right, Top to Bottom) Susan B. Anthony, Joan Baez, Clara Barton, Oprah Winfrey

Mohandas Gandhi passed the bar exam and became a lawyer in 1891, but he frequently suffered from feeling tongue-tied and had doubts he would be a successful lawyer because of his discomfort with public speaking. He felt as if he had trouble speaking with strangers at a party, let alone debate with other lawyers in a court of law. After waiting a long time for his first case, he suffered a major setback. As he rose to cross-examine a witness, he was unable to collect his thoughts. Gandhi collapsed into his chair and ended up refunding his fee to his client. This was a disgraceful debut, which filled the young barrister with deep despair as to his future in a profession he had entered at such a heavy cost. He was saved by his flair for writing and began working as a legal clerk, drafting petitions and memorials. After incurring the wrath of the British Political Agent (in whose court most of his work lay), he accepted a job offer in South Africa where he became exposed to rampant discrimination. He was kicked off a train when he was ordered (as a non-white person) to leave the first class compartment. This event was a life-altering experience for Gandhi, turning a rather shy and unassertive person into a man who led several movements to eliminate discrimination and oppression through non-violent means.

Jimmy Carter was elected President of the United States in 1976. Although he worked hard to combat the problems of inflation and employment which were plaguing the country at that time, his efforts resulted in causing a recession. His presidency also suffered serious setbacks in foreign policy, too. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and then 52 Americans were taken hostage at the Embassy in Iran. After being defeated for a second presidential term, he went on to form the Carter Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing human rights and alleviating unnecessary human suffering in the world. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002 for his efforts in finding peaceful solutions to international conflicts, advancing democracy and human rights, and promoting economic and social development.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, jr. graduated from high school at the age of 15 and went on to obtain a doctor of Theological studies from Boston University. During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King was arrested, his home was bombed, he was subjected to personal abuse. He continued to pursue justice and racial equality and was arrested more than twenty times and assaulted at least four times. King became the youngest man to receive the Nobel Peace Prize (at the age of 35) and turned over the prize money of \$54,000 to furthering the civil rights movement. He was assassinated in 1968.

Paul “Bono” Hewson got a reputation at an early age for being both absent-minded and argumentative, earning him the ironic nickname “the Antichrist.” When he was 15, Hewson suffered the tragic and devastating loss of his mother from a brain aneurysm. In high school, he was given the nickname “Bono Vox” (which means “good voice” in cockneyed Latin). He would later shorten it to just “Bono” when he formed the band which became U2. As the group’s lead singer and songwriter, Bono has created songs which have sent people on spiritual journeys or inspired them to change the direction of their lives.

Despite his growing fame, he repeatedly and publicly has chided himself for not being a “proper” pop star and continually expresses his desire to become a great singer. Outside of his performing with the band U2, Bono has emerged over the years as a social activist, working tirelessly to eliminate poverty in the Third World and stop the spread of AIDS in Africa.

Susan B. Anthony, was very self-conscious of her looks and speaking abilities when she was young. For a long time, she resisted public speaking because she feared she would not be sufficiently eloquent. She grew up in a world where women were seen much differently than they are today, in fact, at one point one of her teachers refused to teach her long division because “she was a girl.” After this incident, her father removed her from the school and taught in a home school created by her father. Later, she attended a Quaker boarding school for women, but was forced to leave after her family was financially devastated by the Panic of 1837. Despite her early insecurity toward her public speaking abilities and the other setbacks she faced, she went on to become a renowned public presence, eventually helping to lead the women's movement, facing much opposition and abuse as she traveled, lectured and canvassed across the nation to campaign for women’s rights.

Joan Baez was frequently subjected to racial slurs and discrimination when she was a child because of her Mexican heritage and features, and yet rejected at the same time by the Mexican American community because she did not speak Spanish. She went on to become a folk musician who wrote and performed songs to invite political change in the United States. Early in her career, she became active in a variety of social causes, including civil rights and nonviolence – and was often arrested for protesting against these injustices. She continues to campaign and sing for peaceful solutions to violence in the Middle East and Latin America.

Clara Barton was intensely shy as a young girl, and was continually seeking acceptance and confirmation of her own worth even into adulthood. Despite this overt shyness and lack of confidence, Clara became a teacher at the age of 17. Her own quest for learning was infectious, and the respect which her pupils bestowed upon her helped to bolster her self-confidence. After a teaching assignment in a dilapidated school without enough textbooks or supplies, Clara overcame her misgivings and successfully presented a plan for improving the school at a town meeting. When the Civil War began and she saw the horrible conditions which awaited wounded soldiers who needed medical care, she began a second career as a nurse. Her experiences in the war (including having to remove a bullet from a soldier’s face herself and having a bullet pass through her sleeve before killing another soldier she was tending) helped her to further overcome her innate shyness and become the strong confident woman who eventually founded the non-profit relief organization, the American Red Cross.

Oprah Winfrey was born in Mississippi to unmarried teenage parents. She spent the first six years of her life with her grandmother in rural poverty. Then she moved to an inner city ghetto of Milwaukee with her mother where she was molested by a cousin, uncle and a family friend from the time she was 9 years old. As a teenager, Oprah ran away and for a time lived on the streets. At the age of 14, she became pregnant, but the baby died at birth. At that time, she was sent to live with her father in Nashville, Tennessee where under his strict influence, she became an honors student and was voted “Most Popular Girl.” She won an oratory contest, securing a scholarship to Tennessee State University and at the age of 18 won the Miss Black Tennessee beauty pageant. She soon became both the youngest news anchor and the first black female news anchor at WALC-TV in Nashville. In 1983, Oprah moved to Chicago in order to host WLS-TV’s low-rated morning talk show. Within months after she took over as host, the show went from last place to become the highest rated talk show in the city of Chicago. It soon was renamed *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and began broadcasting nationally in 1986. Oprah went on to become the world’s only Black Billionaire and even more importantly, according to many people

– the most influential person in the world.

Session Sixteen

Lead Us Not Into Temptation

The movie used in this session, Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Rings is rated PG-13 for epic battle sequences, graphic violence and some scary images – it also runs nearly a full three hours. All of these factors should be taken into account if the decision is made to show the entire movie instead of just an excerpt.

The objectives of this session are:

- to consider ideas about temptation and evil
- to explore ways people have overcome temptation in order to do what's right
- to understand how the Fifth Principle "the right of conscience" can guide us in overcoming temptation

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- tempting foods and beverages such as chocolate, cookies, brownies, carbonated sodas, etc.
- tempting items such as colorful beads, matches, CDs, etc.
- plates, cups, forks, spoons, napkins (optional)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #23 "The Council of Elrond" or cue the videotape to one hour and 26 minutes into the movie

- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)
- gather some tempting items, food and beverages, display them attractively on a table in your meeting room

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Temptations. (5 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. (30 min)

Rising Action: Temptation Role Play. (20 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (5 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, don't offer them any guidance as to the opening activity. You may even appear to be busy doing something or have someone else be in the room for the first few minutes as the participants enter. If you are present, make note of how many wander over to the table with all the temptations laid out on it – and how many people take something from it or inquire about it.

After everyone has arrived and had at least a few minutes to wander the room, see the temptations on the table and possibly sample some of it, announce your observations about how many of the participants appeared to be tempted by the items spread out on the table. Invite some reflection. Why are these things so tempting? Why might they be hard to resist? Are there reasons why they might need to be resisted?

Invite the participants to enjoy the refreshments during the movie (particularly if they did actually resist temptation earlier).

Premiere

Watching Fellowship of the Ring.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Fellowship of the Ring*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, the evil Lord Sauron is seeking the One Ring, which he can use to conquer Middle-earth. The ring holds the promise of great power for anyone who possesses it – but also the temptation of turning evil and joining forces with Lord Sauron.

Currently it is in the possession of the young hobbit, Frodo, who along with his hobbit friends and a mysterious Ranger have delivered the ring to Rivendell where a special council has been called. The Council is made up of representatives from all the different races of Middle-earth – humans, elves, dwarfs, wizards and hobbits. Together they must decide the fate of the ring – and along with it – the fate of their world.

Begin the video and watch scene #23 (The Council of Elrond) followed by scene #24 (Bilbao's Gifts), scene #25 (The Ring Goes South), and scene #26 (The Pass of Caradhras).

In this sequence, the Elven Master, Elrond spells out the dire situation they all face. Despite their differences, they must unite to face the evil which threatens to destroy their world. He instructs Frodo to bring forth the ring. Frodo walks forward and sets the ring on an altar-like table in the center of their circle. While the other members of the council appear amazed and even a bit mesmerized by the ring, Frodo appears to be relieved to have it out of his possession.

Boromir, a prince of the Stewards of Gondor, urges the council to allow him to take the ring. He says his people have been defending all of the races from the evil for some time now, and with the ring in their possession,

they might be able to finally defeat their enemy. "Give Gondor the weapon of the enemy," he says. "Let us use it against him."

Aragorn (the ranger who protected the hobbits on the way to Rivendell and the heir to the throne to Gondor) protests this decision. "You cannot wield it, none of us can," he insists. He says the ring has only one master, the evil one who created it and longs to possess it once again.

Elrond announces to the Council that there is only one choice. The ring must be destroyed.

Gimli (a dwarf) says, "Then what are we waiting for?" as he lunges forward and slams his axe onto the table holding the ring. He is flung backward violently, his axe flies apart – and the ring remains intact.

Elrond explains that the ring cannot be destroyed by any craft they possess. He says that one of them must take the ring to Mordor and destroy it by throwing into the fires of Mount Doom in where it was forged.

Boromir protests that this task is impossible. "One does not simply walk into Mordor," he insists. "There is evil there that does not sleep."

An elf, Legolas, insists that the ring must be destroyed in order to save the world. Conflict erupts in the Council along with the surfacing of distrust toward one another as Gimli protests with the statement, "I'll be dead before I see the ring in the hands of an elf."

As the other members of the Council argue, Frodo looks at the ring with dread and fear. He knows what he must do, but he is reluctant to do it. Eventually he summons up the courage to stand and announce that he will take it to Mount Doom. At first, no one seems to hear him because they are all arguing. Then as he repeats it, they stop bickering with one another and turn to look at him with great awe.

Gandalf the Grey (a wizard) approaches Frodo and promises to help him "bear this burden." Aragorn also steps forward to pledge his very life to protect them on this mission. Legolas the elf also pledges his assistance, as does the dwarf Gimli. Then Boromir comes forward and agrees that if this is indeed the will

of the Council, then he will pledge his assistance as well. After Frodo's hobbit friends join in, Elrond pronounces the nine of them as the Fellowship of the Ring.

After the Council meeting, Bilbo Baggins gives his nephew Frodo some gifts for their journey. As Frodo unbuttons his shirt to try on some chain mail, Bilbo sees the ring hanging on a chain around Frodo's neck. Bilbo reaches out for it, longing to touch it one more time. Frodo closes his shirt and Bilbo lunges for the ring with an evil look on his face. Then as the temptation to possess it passes, Bilbo appears stricken, and deeply ashamed of his actions. He apologizes to Frodo for bringing this burden to him.

The fellowship leaves the safety of Rivendell to head out into the wilderness as their quest begins. Gimli wonders why they are taking the long way. He suggests that instead they go through the mines of Moria. Gandalf says that he would not go that way unless they had no other choice.

Strange birds approach rapidly and the group quickly dives for cover under large rocks. The birds flock all over their hiding places, not attacking them but fluttering all about. Then they fly off in the opposite direction from where they came. Gandalf announces that the birds were spies of the evil Sauron and that they must take the path through the mountains because the road they are on "is being watched."

The group heads over the mountain through the bitter cold and blowing snow of the Pass of Caradhras. As they make their way up the mountain, Frodo trips and goes rolling back down. Aragorn manages to stop him and helps him to his feet, but then Frodo notices that the ring is gone.

Boromir finds it in the snow and picks it up. He appears mesmerized by the ring. Aragorn insists that Boromir give the ring back to Frodo. Boromir appears reluctant to do so. Then at last he slowly moves toward Frodo and gives him back the ring. Only when the ring is back in the possession of Frodo – and Boromir moves away – does Aragorn take his hand off of his sword.

As the group heads off again in the frigid wilderness, Sauron sends an avalanche of snow to try and stop them. Some of the group want to turn back, but Gandalf is resolute. After they manage to dig themselves out of the avalanche of snow, Gimli suggests once again that they go through the Mines of Moria. Gandalf is still reluctant to go that way, but he also recognizes the danger the group faces if they continue on their current path. He then says, "Let the ringbearer decide."

Frodo looks around at his companions and then announces that they should go through the mines.

"So be it," says Gandalf.

If you will not be watching the entire movie, stop the video after Gandalf says "So be it." Ask for first impressions of the video. Then, invite reflection on some questions like:

Why might Boromir, Bilbo and others be so eager to possess the ring and Frodo so reluctant to do so?

How does this make him the perfect one to be in possession of it so that it can be destroyed at the end of their quest?

How can a person's desire for something affect their behavior? How can this desire be overcome?

Despite his misgivings – and his temptation to let someone else be responsible for the destruction of the ring – Frodo knows that he must be the one to deliver the ring to Mount Doom.

Have you ever been faced with a situation when you knew it was important to do the right thing even though you were tempted to walk away and ignore it? How did you handle it?

Why does Gandalf want to avoid the mines of Moria? Why is he tempted to give the responsibility for the decision over to Frodo?

Have you ever been tempted to let someone else make an important decision for you? How did that work out?

Rising Action

Temptation Role Play.

Divide the participants into groups of three or four. Invite each group to role play a situation in which they were either tempted to do something wrong and/or were tempted to let someone else take responsibility. Encourage them to take a moment to brainstorm some possibilities (or use a situation which was mentioned in your earlier discussion) and have a few participants act out the situation. Then have the rest of the participants critique their handling of the temptation. Does anyone have any additional suggestions for avoiding that temptation? How else might the situation be changed by behavior not ruled by temptation? How can we avoid temptation and do the right thing? How can our “right of conscience” as mentioned by the Fifth Principle guide us in our choices?

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about a temptation he or she has had to overcome.

After the first “popper” has finished the statement, then everyone who agrees with this should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own.

This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

Never underestimate the power of temptation to disarm your better senses. Throughout the ages good people surrendered their honor for the empty promise that wealth or power would bring fulfillment and their dignity, good name and self-esteem for the passing pleasures of sex and drugs.

–Michael Josephson
(contemporary author and philosopher)

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #587 “We Were Never Meant to Survive” by Audre Lorde from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

Additional Discussion.

Why did Frodo seek to head off alone in the end? What was he hoping to avoid?

How did the dwarf and elf characters overcome their differences in order to meet the needs of the group? Have you ever had to overcome your mistrust of others in order to accomplish something? How did that work out?

Additional Activities.

Catholics are encouraged to not eat meat on Fridays during Lent (the duration of time between Ash Wednesday and Easter) and to “give up” something which they long for but could do without (such as chocolate, cookies, potato chips or carbonated beverages). Through dealing with the temptation to indulge in these temporarily forbidden items, they can experience some of what Jesus went through during his 40 day ordeal in the desert when he was repeatedly tempted by the primitive instincts of human nature as represented by Satan.

Consider: What would be really difficult for you to do without for a time span of six to eight weeks? Has anyone given up something for good (no longer eating meat for instance)? How difficult was this? Encourage the participants to pick a time in order to do without something (for example, no candy or video games for one week) and then report back the next time your group meets for how that went.

For Muslims, fasting during Ramadan is a method of self-purification. Through the process of cutting oneself off from worldly comforts, spiritual growth occurs. During this time, Muslims must abstain from food, drink and sexual relations from first light until sundown. Over the course of Ramadan, Muslims are faced with much temptation to break the fast, but through sheer power of will are able to overcome this temptation and acquire self-control.

Consider: Do you think you could manage to go from sun up until sundown without eating or drinking? Plan a special day to try this – either a way of learning to overcome temptation, gain spiritual growth or as a way to empathize with all the people who must go hungry because they do not have food to eat.

According to the Buddhist perspective, all life is suffering. However, some of that suffering can be relieved by the Eightfold Path which involves:

Right View
Right Intention
Right Speech
Right Action
Right Livelihood
Right Effort
Right Mindfulness
Right Concentration

Every one of these items on the Eightfold Path requires overcoming temptation of some sort. Post the Eightfold Path on a piece of newsprint and invite the participants to consider how one might be tempted away from each of these and how these specific temptations might be overcome. (For example being tempted to spread negative rumors about someone would be a violation of right speech but could be overcome by not being willing to participate in such gossip.)

Explore the Temptation Prayers in Resource 16-A. What do they say about the nature of the religious traditions of which they are a part? Do the participants find any of them meaningful? If not, what wording would be useful? Encourage the participants to create the wording for a prayer which would be useful for them in helping them to avoid temptation.

Resource 16-A
Temptation Prayers

Our Father,
Who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy Will be done,
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
- Matthew 6:9-13

In the name of Allah,
Most gracious, Most merciful
Praise be to Allah,
the Cherisher and Sustainer of the Worlds
Most Gracious, Most Merciful.
Master of the Day of Judgement
Thee do we worship, and Thine aide we seek
Show us the straight way
The way of those on whom Thou has bestowed thy Grace,
those whose portion is not wrath,
and who do not go astray
- opening words of the Qur'an

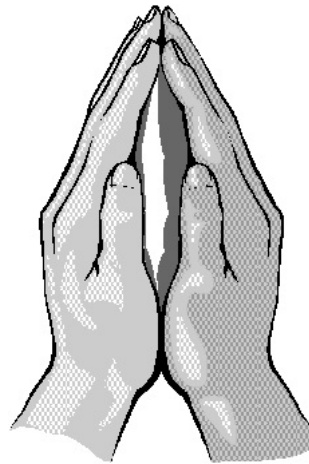
The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul;
He guideth me in straight paths for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me;
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou hast anointed my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

- Psalms 23: 1-6

Oh God! Thou art the Giver of Life,
Remover of pain and sorrow,
The Bestower of happiness,
Oh! Creator of the Universe,
May we receive thy supreme sin-destroying light,
May Thou guide our intellect in the right direction.

- The Vedas (Hindu)

Though the many beings are numberless,
I vow to save them.
Though greed, hatred, and ignorance rise endlessly,
I vow to cut them off.
Though the Dharma is vast and fathomless,
I vow to understand it.
Though Buddha's Way is beyond attainment,
I vow to embody it fully.
– Zen Vows (Buddhist)



Session Seventeen

Second Chances

The objectives of this session are:

- to explore the idea of forgiveness
- to consider how forgiving someone can be freeing not only to the person who is being forgiven, but also for the one doing the forgiving
- to recognize the importance of seeking forgiveness in religious traditions all over the world – including our own

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Hoosiers*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- bubble wands (one for each participant)
- bubble solution (may be purchased at the store or you can create your own by combining 1 part dishwashing detergent (Dawn or Joy work best), 15 parts water and 1/4 part glycerine or Karo white syrup)

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #15 “The Proposition ” or cue the videotape to approximately 46 minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety beforehand (even if you have seen it before)
- make copies of the forgiveness prayers in Resource 17-A and post on the wall of your meeting space

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Forgiveness Prayers. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Hoosiers*. (25 min)

Rising Action: Forgiveness Bubbles. (10 min)

Plot Point: Asking for Forgiveness. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to look over the forgiveness prayers posted on the wall which are taken from various religious faiths. After everyone has arrived and had at least a few minutes to read them over, invite some reflection. Do they recognize any of them? Are any of them surprising to them? Why are there so many prayers of forgiveness? Why might asking forgiveness be an essential part of all these religious traditions?

Premiere

Watching *Hoosiers*.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Hoosiers*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, Norman Dale arrives in the small town of Hickory, IN to be the high school basketball coach. He soon faces a host of challenges. The star player, Jimmy, (and possibly the best high school basketball player in the state) refuses to play on the team because he is suffering from grief over the death of the last coach. The players who are on the team are very cocky and don't want to follow his guidance despite his years of experience. Even the townspeople are frustrated with the Coach's insistence on rudimentary drills ... and they become livid when he insists one of their best players sit on the bench because he wasn't following his instructions.

Begin the video and watch scene #15 (The Proposition) followed by scene #16 (A New Assistant), scene #17 (Referendum to Remove), scene #18 (Passing to Shooter), scene #19 (Unexpected Support) and scene #20 (The Referendum).

In this sequence, Coach Norman Dale arrives at Shooter's home to ask him to be his assistant coach. Shooter is pleased and honored, but also a little unsure. Then Coach Dale tells him he can only do it if he meets certain conditions. He must clean himself up, shave, wear a suit – and be sober. Shooter bristles at this last condition, and seems offended at the suggestion. Coach Dale goes yet further to tell Shooter that his behavior has been embarrassing his son. Shooter is furious and throws him out of his house.

After the next basketball game is underway, Shooter shows up dressed in a suit and tie and is indeed sober. Coach Dale introduces the new assistant coach to the team. Shooter is nervous but clearly trying to make an effort.

The next day, when class ends, Shooter's son expresses his misgivings over Coach Dale's willingness to have Shooter be the assistant coach. Coach Dale says, "Everyone deserves a second chance."

The son mumbles, "Not my father."

Then Myra (who is now acting principal) shows up to inform him a petition is being circulated with the intent to remove him as basketball coach.

During the next basketball game, Coach Dale gets kicked off the floor by an irate official

after he objects to the call as a technical foul. Shooter is required to step up and lead the team as coach in his absence.

Afterward, Myra talks to Coach Dale and offers her support, even though she initially resented his presence in town and questioned his motives. She tells him that his offering a second chance to Shooter was noble and she appreciated what he was doing. She also tells him that she realizes this position was a second chance for him also since she now knows he was suspended from ever being a coach at the college level.

At the town meeting, Coach Dale defends himself. He insists he will not apologize for any of his actions because he believes he was doing the right thing. He believes he was making the team the best it could be and he was proud of all the boys on the team.

Myra steps up to the podium and announces that it would be a big mistake to vote "yes" on the referendum. She suggests that they all ought to "give him a chance."

Jimmy (the star basketball player who until now had been refusing to play with the team) arrives at the meeting. He steps up to the podium at the front of the room and announces he is ready to play basketball again. Everyone cheers. Then he says he will play with the team under one condition: Coach Dale must stay and coach the team.

One of the men announces that the vote has already been taken and the Coach is out. Someone else suggests the vote be done again. A new vote is conducted and the ballots are torn up. Coach Dale is given another chance and allowed to stay.

If you will not be watching the entire video, pause it when the crowd cheers after the ballots are torn up. Ask the group for first impressions of what they witnessed. Then focus the discussion by asking questions like:

Why do you suppose Jimmy stepped forward at the meeting to say he would play ball again – but only if Coach Dale stayed?

Why might he have been willing to give him a chance when so many others weren't?

Why do you suppose Coach Dale was so willing to give Shooter a chance to redeem himself by becoming his assistant coach?

Shooter's son protested that his father wasn't worthy of the second chance Coach Dale was offering him. Why is it easier to give someone a second chance when you are not the one who was wronged by them?

Have you ever had to forgive someone for something they did to you? How did that work out? Were you able to give that person a second chance?

Is there a time when someone should not be given a second chance? What if that second chance turns into a third, fourth or fifth? Can a person still be forgiven without being given "another chance" to redeem his or herself?

Rising Action

Forgiveness Bubbles.

Share with the participants the idea that forgiveness does not mean forgetting what happened or trying to shove away the past. It also does not mean condoning the behavior or that you are willing for the behavior to continue.

Instead, offering a person (or yourself) forgiveness can be an opportunity to free yourself from the burden of anger and pain. We cannot change the past, only our response to it. Our feelings of resentment and anger do not hurt the person who caused us this pain, but only ourselves.

But offering forgiveness is not easy, and like other difficult things in life – requires practice. It is a process of letting go – and it may take several serious efforts before a person is actually able to let go of the resentment and forgive how they feel they were wronged.

If weather permits, take the group outside into the fresh air. Bring out the bubble wands and the bubble solution. Invite the participants to each take a bubble wand and dip it in some solution.

Then invite them to keep the thoughts of someone they would like to forgive in their mind (perhaps even themselves) as they blow bubbles. Encourage them to breathe out the thought "I forgive you" as they blow the bubbles, sending their negative feelings out into the bubbles and away into the air.

Note: This exercise would be more powerful if conducted outdoors, allowing the wind to carry away the bubbles before they pop, but even if the weather does not allow your group to go outside, the bubble blowing ritual can still be effective.

Plot Point

Asking for Forgiveness.

Some religions have forgiveness rituals as a crucial part of their tradition. Catholics use the sacrament of Confession whereby they regularly meet with a priest to confess their sins in search of absolution. Most Protestant denominations encourage their followers to seek forgiveness by appealing directly to God through prayer. Yom Kippur, one of the holiest days of the Jewish year is a time when everyone looks back at the previous year and seeks forgiveness for their transgressions. On this day of Atonement, they seek forgiveness in the hope of starting over fresh in the new year. Muslims are expected to ask for Allah's forgiveness daily through prayer. (Refer back to the forgiveness prayers posted on the wall as you talk about the various traditions.)

Ask the participants about Unitarian Universalists. Is asking for forgiveness an important part of our religious faith, too? (*If they don't think so, ask them how we can live up to the sixth Principle – the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all when harboring resentment can cause us to act in ways which are hurtful and mean toward those who wronged us.*)

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about forgiveness or giving someone a second chance.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says these closing words:

Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.

– Mahatma Gandhi (who forgave his assassin even as he himself lay dying)

To err is human, to forgive – divine.

– Alexander Pope (18th century poet)

End the session with a unison reading of Reading # 477 “Forgive Us,” from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

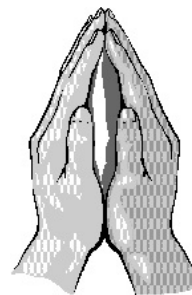
More Discussion.

Why did Myra who was so opposed to Coach Dale’s presence at the beginning of the movie have a change of heart? What made her willing to give him a chance?

How did Coach Dale’s insistence that the group play as a team help them make it to the State Championship – and ultimately to win?

More Activities.

Invite the participants to write their own forgiveness prayers ... or a letter to someone they need to offer forgiveness.



*Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, Thy will be done – on Earth as
it is in Heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread. And forgive us our
trespasses, as we forgive those who
trespass against us. And lead us not
into temptation. But deliver us from
evil. Amen.*

– The Lord's Prayer (Christian)

Lord, remember not only the men of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us. Remember rather the fruits we have brought, thanks to this suffering: our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown out of this. And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness.

*— found on a scrap of paper at the liberation of Ravensbruck
Concentration Camp in Germany*

In the beginning, as a result of my own deeds in past lives, I arrive in the womb of my mother, and stay there in all helplessness and discomfort. Forgive me, O Lord. Forgive my sinful past deeds.

– Hindu prayer of forgiveness from the Stotra Mala

© God you are my Lord, there is none worthy of worship besides You. You created me and I am your servant, and I am on your path as best I can. I seek refuge in You from any evil I have committed. I confess to Your blessings upon me, and I confess to You my sins, so forgive me. Verily none forgives sins except You.

– Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)

*I grant forgiveness to
all living beings.*

*May all the living beings
please forgive me.*

*I have friendship with
all the living beings.*

I have no hostility towards anyone.

– Jainism Prayer of Forgiveness

From arrogance, pompousness, and from thinking ourselves more important than we are, may some saving sense of humor liberate us. For allowing ourselves to ridicule the faith of others, may we be forgiven. From making war and calling it peace, special privilege and calling it justice, indifference and calling it progress, may we be cured.

– Harry Meserve, Unitarian Universalist Minister

Session Eighteen

Where Dreams Come True

The objectives of this session are:

- to explore the idea behind dreams and the quest for meaning in life
- to consider how not achieving those dreams can cause regret
- to understand how heaven can be likened to a place “where dreams come true”

Materials and supplies you will need:

- DVD (or videotape) of the movie, *Field of Dreams*
- DVD player or VCR and TV monitor
- several copies of the UU hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*
- large posterboard paper for collage
- markers
- stickers with statements about dreams (can be found at craft stores or in the scrapbooking aisle of other stores)
- old magazines with advertisements which can be cut out and added to word collage
- scissors and adhesive
- writing paper
- pens or pencils
- envelopes

Things to do ahead of time:

- locate the DVD or videotape and rent it from the library or video store if necessary
- Using the DVD menu, select scene #29 “They Will Come” or cue the videotape to approximately one hour and 22 minutes into the movie
- watch the movie in its entirety (even if you have seen it before)

Session Outline

Entering Activity: Word Collage of Dreams. (10 min)

Premiere: Watching an excerpt of the movie, *Field of Dreams*. (25 min)

Rising Action: Exploring Personal Dreams. (10 min)

Plot Point: Baseball as Metaphor. (5 min)

Wrap Up: Popcorn, Closing Words. (10 min)

Entering Activity

As participants arrive, invite them to create a word collage about dreams – what do people long for in their lives? What are their hopes and dreams? What words and ideas represent the dreams which people hold for themselves?

After everyone has arrived and had at least a few minutes to contribute to the mural, invite some reflection on the words and ideas. What about dreams is represented? Is there anything about dreams which is not represented? Why are dreams so important?

Premiere

Watching *Field of Dreams*.

Introduce the video by telling the group you will be watching an excerpt from the movie *Field of Dreams*. Ask if anyone has already seen it. If anyone has, ask them if they would be willing to share the premise of the film with the group. If not, introduce the video yourself by saying something like:

In this movie, a man has been inspired by a mysterious voice to create a baseball park in the middle of his cornfield.

The ballpark appears to be some sort of portal to another place where famous and not so famous baseball players can return to live out their dreams. So even though keeping it means losing a lot of money, Ray and his family are determined to leave it be so the players can return and experience the dreams they were unable to achieve during their lifetimes. This is especially important to Ray who regrets the fact that his father wanted him to be a baseball player and live out the dream that he himself once had. However, Ray never wanted to be a baseball player and grew to resent this so much that it eventually caused an ugly fight between father and son that they never got over – and now that his father was dead – it seems as if they never would be able to.

Begin the video and watch scene #29 (People will Come) followed by scene #30 (Graham's Choice), scene #31 (Moonlight Goes Home), scene #32 (The Rapture of Terrence Mann), scene #33 (He Will Come) and scene #34 (The Place Where Dreams Come True).

In this sequence, Ray is being badgered by his brother-in-law to sell the farm because they are bankrupt. Ray's young daughter, Karen, suggests they could charge people to come and watch the baseball players play ball to make money so they could keep the farm and the ballfield. Because Ray's brother-in-law is unable to see the players on the ballfield, he thinks this is a crazy idea.

Terrence Mann (who had arrived to witness the miracle of the field of dreams) agrees with Karen. He says people will come, longing for the past. He says there are many people who are seeking unfulfilled dreams or to remember the good of the past. He says "they have money, but its peace they lack." Mann says the game of baseball "reminds us of all that was once good and could be again."

Karen's uncle is frustrated because he thinks Ray's "crazy" thinking has affected her and he shakes her. Ray grabs for his daughter, and in the scuffle, Karen falls from the bleachers. She is clearly hurt and lays on the ground motionless. As the adults clamor to find medical attention, a young baseball player on the field (Graham) who had been a doctor in life, teeters uncertainly on the end of the baseball field. He appears unsure whether he could or should step off the field. He does, and when he

does so, he immediately returns to his state as an elderly man who lived his life as a doctor. Graham approaches Karen, immediately assesses that she is choking and with a few raps on the back, manages to dislodge the hot dog she had been choking on.

When it is clear that Karen is fine, Ray thanks Graham for helping her. Graham tells him, "No, thank you." Then Ray realizes that because Graham stepped off the field, he can't go back. Ray realizes the sacrifice Graham made, but Graham seems to be without regret because he was grateful to have one more chance to play ball and a chance to live his dream to play well in a game with major league baseball players.

As Graham walks back to the field, the players all tell him he did a great job. He disappears into the cornfield a happy man.

Now the brother-in-law appears to see all of the other baseball players and he finally agrees that the farm should not be sold.

Shoeless Joe invites Terrence Mann to come with them as they leave the field to disappear back into the cornfield. Ray wants to go, but it is clear he is not invited. Mann reveals that he too has an unrealized dream in regard to baseball, and that is why he is supposed to go and Ray is not.

Ray is angry. He confronts Shoeless Joe and says that he did everything he was asked. He wants to know what's in it for him. Joe asks him "Is this why you did this – for you?" Ray appears chastised. Joe then tells him, "I think you better stay here."

Mann goes into the cornfield after the ball players and disappears along with them.

Joe says "Build it, and he will come," repeating the commandment that Ray received which originally inspired him to build the baseball field. Now Ray realizes that the "he" who is supposed to come if it's built was not Shoeless Joe as he'd thought, but Ray's own father, John.

The only remaining baseball player is the catcher, and when he takes off his catcher's mask, Ray recognizes his father as a young man. He is surprised to see how young he is, since Ray always perceived him

as old. Ray appears unsure what to say, but his wife encourages him to introduce him to the granddaughter he never knew. John (Ray's father) thanks them for building the ballfield and allowing them to play there.

After Ray's wife and daughter go back to the house to leave father and son to talk, John says, "It's so beautiful here, like a dream come true. Is this heaven?"

Ray answers, "No, it's Iowa."

John replies, "I could've sworn it was heaven."

Then Ray asks, "Is there a heaven?"

His father replies, "Oh, yeah. It's the place where dreams come true."

Ray smiles and says, "Then maybe this is heaven."

Ray asks his father if he would like to play catch, and they do so, healing the rift between father and son and fulfilling the dream which eliminated the regret each of them harbored over their severed relationship.

Pause the video when the ending credits begin. Ask the group for first impressions of what they witnessed. Then focus the discussion by asking questions like:

Terrence Mann said many people would come and pay money to watch baseball games because they may "have money, but they do not have peace." Why might so many people not have peace?

So many of the baseball players were coming to the ball field to live out dreams they were unable to experience in their lives. Why does this seem so important to them?

Graham made a choice to step off the baseball field and become a doctor again so that he could help the injured Karen – just as he did when he was a young man and gave up baseball to become a doctor. How can a choice someone makes mean the end of a dream they had? Why might someone make such a choice?

Ray's father says heaven is "the place

where dreams come true." Why are the dreams we have so important? And why

might not achieving them mean a life of regrets?

Rising Action

Exploring Personal Dreams.

Remind the participants that Ray's father had the dream that his son would grow up to be a baseball player, but that was not Ray's dream for himself. This caused a real conflict between the two of them. Do their parent(s) have any dreams for them that are in conflict with what they want out of life? Why or why not? How does this affect their relationship with the parent(s)? Do they have any dreams that they feel their parent(s) don't support? How does this affect their relationship?

Pass out some paper and pencils. Invite the participants to write a letter to themselves or their parent(s) explaining their dreams and why they are so important to them. When the letters are complete, encourage the participants to either give their letters to their parent(s) or keep them in a safe place so they can be referred to later in life as a reminder of what is important and meaningful to them.

Note: Explain up-front that while participants are encouraged to give away those letters which are addressed to their parent(s), they are not required to do so. This may encourage some youth to have the initial motivation to address the letter to a parent without the threat of having the parent actually seeing it. They may change their minds at some point, and that is good, but even if they do not, the exercise in putting the thoughts and ideas down on paper can be very constructive.

Invite the participants to place the letters in the envelopes and seal them.

little victories along your path will
take on greater meaning.

– Oprah Winfrey

Plot Point

Baseball as Metaphor.

Remind the participants that in this movie, baseball is offered up as a metaphor for all that is good and can be good again. But how can baseball also be a metaphor for working to achieve your dreams?

(Answer: You need to work hard, apply your skills, and there will be others – like those players on the other team – who will try to prevent you from achieving those goals. Achieving your dreams may require you to step up to bat, hit the ball far into the field and run the bases in order to make it home without being tagged “out.”)

Wrap Up

Popcorn.

Invite the participants to gather in a circle to engage in the usual closing activity, “Popcorn.” For this activity, a person pops up (either a hand or full body as they are able or choose to do) and says aloud a short statement (one sentence or less) about why a person’s dreams are important in their life or a dream they have for themselves.

After the first “popper” has finished his or her statement, then everyone who agrees with this statement should also “pop” up (a hand or body as desired). One of the people already “popped” can then choose to share something of their own to which the rest of the group can then “pop.” If no one already “popped” has a comment to add, then someone else can feel free to “pop up” with a comment of their own. This “popping” can continue as long as time allows.

Closing Words.

Invite a participant to light the chalice while you or another participant says the closing words:

The key to realizing a dream is to focus not on success but significance
- and then even the small steps and

End the session with a unison reading of Reading #488 “Hold Fast to Dreams,” from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

Taking It One Step Further:

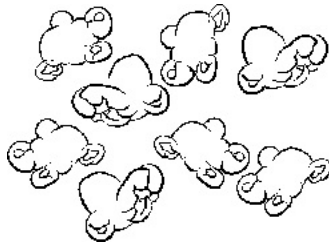
If your group will be watching the entire movie rather than just an excerpt, here are some additional ideas to expand the experience:

More Discussion.

Ray and his family insisted upon keeping the ballfield despite the personal cost to their family. When have you insisted upon something despite the personal cost? What was that like?

More Activities.

If time, space and weather allows, consider inviting the group to play a game of softball or kickball to help illustrate the point of baseball (or sports) as a metaphor for achieving your dreams.



Appendix

Listing of Movies By Session

Using Popcorn Theology in Overnights or Retreats

Annotated Table of Contents





Listing of Movies Used By Session

Session #	Title	Movie
1.	No Blank Slate	<i>Back to the Future</i>
2.	Don't Worry, Be Happy	<i>Star Trek Generations</i>
3.	Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates	<i>Forrest Gump</i>
4.	Shades of Gray	<i>Saved!</i>
5.	What Goes Around, Comes Around	<i>Little Buddha</i>
6.	True or False?	<i>Star Trek V: The Final Frontier</i>
7.	What Do I Want To Know?	<i>Oh, God!</i>
8.	Who's Got the Power?	<i>Bruce Almighty</i>
9.	What's a Soul Got To Do With It?	<i>Heaven Can Wait</i>
10.	What Do I Take on Faith?	<i>Contact</i>
11.	The Fear Factor	<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>
12.	Hope Against All Odds	<i>Hotel Rwanda</i>
13.	Where's The Line?	<i>Jurassic Park</i>
14.	Moving Beyond Assumptions	<i>Dances with Wolves</i>
15.	No Doubt	<i>Willow</i>
16.	Lead Us Not Into Temptation	<i>Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring</i>
17.	Second Chances	<i>Hoosiers</i>
18.	Where Dreams Come True	<i>Field of Dreams</i>

Using *Popcorn Theology* for Overnights or Youth Retreats

This curriculum easily lends itself to a program of overnights for youth. By combining related sessions, you can offer a series of retreats or overnights. Here are some suggestions for doubling up to create some meaningful overnight programs.

Overnight #1

Combine session one (No Blank Slate) and session five (What Goes Around, Comes Around) for an overnight on the theme of choices, actions and karma. Movies: *Back to the Future* and *Little Buddha*.

Overnight #2

Combine sessions two and three for an overnight on happiness, contentment and gratitude. Movies: *Star Trek Generations* and *Forrest Gump*.

Overnight #3

Combine sessions four (Shades of Gray) and fourteen (Moving Beyond Assumptions) for an overnight on the theme of the right of conscience. Movies: *Saved!* and *Dances with Wolves*.

Overnight #4

Combine sessions six (True or False?) and ten (What Do I Take on Faith?) for an overnight on the theme of searching for truth. Movies: *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* and *Contact*.

Overnight #5

Combine sessions seven (What Do I Want to Know?) and eight (Whose Got the Power?) for an overnight on the theme of divine responsibility. Movies: *Oh, God!* and *Bruce Almighty*.

Overnight #6

Combine sessions eleven (The Fear Factor) and twelve (Hope Against All Odds) for an overnight on the theme of social justice. Movies: *Bowling for Columbine* and *Hotel Rwanda*.

Overnight #7

Combine sessions fifteen (No Doubt) and sixteen (Lead Us Not Into Temptation) for an overnight on the theme of overcoming obstacles. Movies: *Willow* and *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*.

Overnight #8

Combine sessions seventeen (Second Chances) and Eighteen (Where Dreams Come True) for an overnight with the theme of dreams and redemption. Movies: *Hoosiers* and *Field of Dreams*.

Annotated Table of Contents

Session One: No Blank Slate

Theme: how our choices affect the future

Movie: *Back to the Future*

Activities: Making Name Tags, Creating a Covenant, Play *Jenga*

Materials Needed: newsprint, markers, unlined index cards, markers, stickers, colored pencils, *Jenga* game, name tag holders

Session Two: Don't Worry, Be Happy

Theme: finding inner peace

Movie: *Star Trek Generations*

Activities: Happiness Collage, Destroying Barriers to Happiness, Discovering Santosha

Materials Needed: flash paper, large black cauldron or cooking pot, posterboard, old magazines, glue or adhesive, pencils

Session Three: Life Is Like a Box of Chocolates

Theme: cultivating an attitude of gratitude

Movie: *Forrest Gump*

Activities: Community Puzzle, lighting votive candles as we share our gratitude, how life is like a box of chocolates

Materials Needed: blank puzzle (or posterboard cut into puzzle pieces), fancy box of chocolates, markers, colored pencils, votive candles

Session Four: Shades of Gray

Theme: the middle ground between right and wrong

Movie: *Saved!*

Activities: Grayscale pictures, "What Would You Do?" (values voting exercise)

Materials Needed: none

Session Five: What Goes Around, Comes Around

Theme: concept of karma

Movie: *Little Buddha*

Activities: Playing Cause/Effect games, The Karma Game, UU ideas about karma

Materials Needed: simple cause/effect games (Dominoes, Pick-Up sticks, *Mousetrap*), two boxes, masking tape, heavy cardstock

Session Six: True or False?

Theme: how truth is determined by perspective

Movie: *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*

Activities: Optical Illusions, The Mystery Box, our search for truth

Materials Needed: books with hidden pictures, optical illusions or stereograms, large shoe box, pieces of cardboard, four small items, small Ziploc bag with potpourri or cinnamon

Session Seven: What Do I Want To Know?

Theme: thinking about the big questions

Movie: *Oh, God!*

Activities: Matching divine images with religions, “Snowball Fight” of big questions, Looking to the Sources

Materials Needed: images of Gods/Goddess/Divine Presence/Great Spirit, sheets of writing paper, pencils or pens, prizes for matching activity (optional)

Session Eight: Who’s Got the Power?

Theme: things we have control over and those we do not

Movie: *Bruce Almighty*

Activities: reviewing world prayers, voting on what we have control over in our lives, UU views of prayer

Materials Needed: Hebrew and Christian Bibles, other sacred texts or copies of prayers from a variety of religions (including Unitarian Universalism), 2 small pieces of posterboard, markers

Session Nine: What’s a Soul Got To Do With It?

Theme: concept of a soul

Movie: *Heaven Can Wait*

Activities: guessing what is inside unlabeled cans, creating containers out of Sculpey, clay or Playdough

Materials Needed: variety of canned foods with labels removed, can openers, clay, Sculpey or Playdough, small plates or bowls (optional), access to microwave (optional)

Session Ten: What Do I Take on Faith

Theme: conflict between faith and science

Movie: *Contact*

Activities: determining Faith or Fact, “Leap of Faith” activity, Our Own Leaps of Faith

Materials Needed: heavy cardstock, double sided tape or other adhesive

Session Eleven: The Fear Factor

Theme: fear and violence in society

Movie: *Bowling for Columbine*

Activities: Scary Headline collage, Fear Factor (creative exercise in making it as scary as possible)

Materials Needed: newspapers with “scary” headlines, large posterboard, scissors, large posterboard, copies of materials from internet which might inspire fear (gang activity, SARS epidemic, terrorist acts, etc)

Session Twelve: Hope Against All Odds

Theme: how inaction leads to injustice

Movie: *Hotel Rwanda*

Activities: playing card and dice games, planning social justice project

Materials Needed: playing cards, dice, cup, newsprint, markers, computer with internet access (optional), *Amnesty International* magazine, print outs of information on genocide from internet

Session Thirteen: Where's The Line?

Theme: ethics and science

Movie: *Jurassic Park*

Activities: Scientific Advancements in the News, Stranded Island activity

Materials Needed: articles on scientific advancement from internet, newspapers and magazines

Session Fourteen: Moving Beyond Assumptions

Theme: being open to "the other"

Movie: *Dances with Wolves*

Activities: Labeling Activity, Discovering Personal Biases, Radical Hospitality

Materials Needed: cardstock, index cards, pencils, double-sided tape or adhesive, large bowl

Session Fifteen: No Doubt

Theme: overcoming self doubt

Movie: *Willow*

Activities: Real Life Heroes, Obstacle Course with special challenge, how Unitarian Universalism helps us with doubt

Materials Needed: variety of items to create obstacle course (boxes, chairs, tires, ropes, sheets, blankets, etc.), blindfold (optional)

Session Sixteen: Lead Us Not Into Temptation

Theme: overcoming temptation

Movie: *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*

Activities: Dealing with Temptations, Temptation role play

Materials Needed: tempting foods and beverages (chocolate, cookies, brownies, carbonated beverages), tempting items (colorful beads, matches, CDs), plates, cups, forks, spoons, napkins

Session Seventeen: Second Chances

Theme: offering forgiveness

Movie: *Hoosiers*

Activities: Forgiveness prayers, Forgiveness Bubbles ritual

Materials Needed: bubble wands and bubble solution

Session Eighteen: Where Dreams Come True

Theme: achieving our dreams

Movie: *Field of Dreams*

Activities: Collage of dreams, writing letters about dreams, baseball as metaphor for life

Materials Needed: large posterboard, markers, stickers, scissors, adhesive, old magazines, writing paper, pens or pencils, envelopes