

UU 201 – ETHICS FOR UU'S WORKSHOPS 1A & 1B – The Locus of Moral Authority

Unthinking Respect For Authority Is The Greatest Enemy Of Truth - Albert Einstein

GOALS

This workshop will:

- Introduce participants to one another
- Introduce the program
- Go over the schedule and structure of the workshops
- Foster participants' sharing of expectations and hopes for the program
- Introduce the notion of moral authority
- Encourage participants to explore the framework which guides their moral and ethical decision making
- Distribute pertinent workshop handouts

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Be familiar with and committed to the program
- Understand the workshops' structure and schedule
- Have shared their expectations and hopes for the program
- Be familiar with the notion of moral authority
- Be able to identify where they locate moral authority to guide their ethical and moral decision making.

WORKSHOP 1B - AT-A-GLANCE

Activity	Minutes
Welcoming, signing-in, resources/handouts	5
Reading and lighting the chalice	5
Activity 1: Creating a group covenant	25
Activity 2: Emerson's Locus of Moral Authority	25

Handouts:

- Emerson document
- Creating a group covenant document

Homework and Handouts: Will be sent prior to Workshop 2A, scheduled for October 9, 2022

Closing: Introduction to Workshops 2A & 2B

Workshop's registration, information, agenda and handouts can all be found on UUCJ's website:

[UU 201: Ethics for Unitarian Universalists – Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville \(uucj.org\)](http://uucj.org)

UU 201 – ETHICS FOR UU'S

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Ralph Waldo Emerson advocated direct experience of religious sentiment, unmediated by clergy, or by tradition or ritual. In describing himself as a "Transcendentalist," Emerson lifted up his belief that it was possible for people to have a direct, transcendent experience of reality, a personal experience of God (what he called the Over Soul), by turning inward. He believed that the sacred which exists without and all around us also exists within, and that by turning inward and getting in deeper touch with our truest nature, we can experience and be informed by that light inside us.

Emerson had some disdain for the preaching style of his time. His view was that ministers should share from the pulpit an authentic and personal reflection of themselves and their lives, rather than preach from a detached, intellectual perspective. He urged ministers to share their experience "passed through the fire of thought" and deep reflection.

Emerson's decisions and statements help us to understand his locus of moral authority. For example, he relied on personal experience as the source of moral authority when he went against his parishioners' wishes in refusing to offer communion. In advocating for an unmediated, personal experience of religion and writing that the essential nature of the human experience is the cultivation of character, Emerson affirmed that moral authority is located within the self. Emerson's ideas still resonate with many Unitarian Universalists today.

Remarks by Ralph Waldo Emerson delivered before the graduating class of Harvard's Divinity School on July 15, 1838

The intuition of the moral sentiment is an insight of the perfection of the laws of the soul. These laws execute themselves. They are out of time, out of space, and not subject to circumstance. Thus, in the soul of man there is a justice whose retributions are instant and entire. He who does a good deed, is instantly ennobled. He who does a mean deed, is by the action itself contracted. He who puts off impurity, thereby puts on purity. If a man is at heart just, then in so far is he God; the safety of God, the immortality of God, the majesty of God do enter into that man with justice. If a man dissemble, deceive, he deceives himself, and goes out of acquaintance with his own being. A man in the view of absolute goodness, adores, with total humility. Every step so downward, is a step upward. The man who renounces himself, comes to himself.

See how this rapid intrinsic energy worketh everywhere, righting wrongs, correcting appearances, and bringing up facts to a harmony with thoughts. Its operation in life, though slow to the senses, is, at last, as sure as in the soul. By it, a man is made the Providence to himself, dispensing good to his goodness, and evil to his sin. Character is always known. Thefts never enrich; alms never impoverish; murder will speak out of stone walls. The least admixture of a lie, for example, the taint of vanity, the least attempt to make a good impression, a favorable appearance, will instantly vitiate the effect. But speak the truth, and all nature and all spirits help you with unexpected furtherance. Speak the truth, and all things alive or brute are vouchers, and the very roots of the grass underground there, do seem to stir and move to bear you witness. See again the perfection of the Law as it applies itself to the affections, and becomes the law of society. As we are, so we associate. The good, by affinity, seek the good; the vile, by affinity, the vile. Thus of their own volition, souls proceed into heaven, into hell.

FIND OUT MORE

Andrews, Barry M. [*A Dream Too Wild: Emerson Meditations for Every Day of the Year*](#) (Boston: Skinner House, 2003)

Andrews, Barry M. [*Emerson As Spiritual Guide: A Companion to Emerson's Essays for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion*](#) (Boston: Skinner House, 2003)

Miller, P. *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950)

Richardson, R. *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996)
[Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) in the *Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography*.

UU 201 – ETHICS FOR UU'S

EMERSON'S LOCUS OF MORAL AUTHORITY – EMERSON'S MORAL DILEMMA

Ralph Waldo Emerson was a leading 19th-century philosopher, father of the Transcendentalist movement. Before he became a philosophical and literary luminary, he was a Unitarian minister and served the Second Church in Boston between 1829 and 1832. In pursuing ministry, Ralph Waldo followed in the footsteps of his father, William Emerson, a Unitarian minister who served Boston's First Church.

In 1831 and 1832, the younger Emerson became embroiled in a controversy at Second Church. As a Unitarian Christian minister, Emerson was expected to regularly conduct a communion service. Emerson did not find the act of communion personally meaningful. Because he was interested in a depth of authentic personal experience with the sacred that did not have room for ritual for the sake of ritual, Emerson told his congregation he would no longer offer the sacrament of communion.

His decision created uproar. For many Christian Unitarians, communion was a central sacrament.

Although the congregation was fond of Emerson, his declaration seemed unreasonable to them. Church leaders tried to negotiate with Emerson, hoping he would change his mind. They offered a compromise: Since the parishioners found the act of communion meaningful, they asked if Emerson could perhaps offer communion to the attendees of the church but not partake of the sacrament himself, in light of his philosophical objections. Emerson did not agree to this compromise and the negotiations were not successful.

Emerson recognized this disagreement with the congregation of Second Church as an insurmountable difference between his philosophical and spiritual understanding and the congregation's, and he voluntarily resigned his pulpit. While he never disavowed Unitarianism, or his status as a minister, he never again used his title "Reverend" nor served a congregation. Instead, he chose to express himself through lecturing and writing.

Emerson believed we cultivate our own character and through this cultivation become agents of good or evil in the world. Further, cultivation of character is grounded in an unmediated experience of the sacred, one that occurs by looking inward. Finding that spark of divinity within us, it is possible to have a direct, transcendent experience of the holy. Emerson's belief became the cornerstone of the Transcendentalist movement, and Emerson's greatest spiritual contribution to Unitarian Universalism.

Write down your answer and how you reasoned to come up with your answer. Bring it to the next workshop at which you will share with one other participant. One of you will be reporting on the ethical principles/rules/edicts/reasons, or framework your partner used to come up with the answer.

UU 201 – ETHICS FOR UU’S

WORKSHOPS 1A AND 1B

TAKING IT HOME

Unthinking respect for authority is the greatest enemy of truth. — Albert Einstein

Share with family members or friends the story you wrote about in Workshop 1A, Activity X. What Guides Me? Invite them to share stories that help them frame their ethical and moral decision making.

As you go about your daily life, notice when you hear or read statements that rest on moral or ethical precepts. When you encounter such statements, ask yourself:

- Where is the authority behind these statements?
- How do you feel about the ethical authority this institution or individual has claimed or assigned?
- What do you perceive as having given that individual or institution the right to claim or assign moral authority?

UU 201 – ETHCS FOR UU’S

WORKSHOP 1B – THE LOCUS OF MORAL AUTHORITY HANDOUT

ACTIVITY 1 – CREATNG A GROUP COVENANT

A covenant is foundational to our tradition: We are united by our promises to one another, rather than by a shared creed. While our Principles and Sources are a covenant intended to guide congregations that are part of the Unitarian Universalist Association, many Unitarian Universalist congregations have adopted this covenant to guide their own lives and to help them with moral and ethical choices. However, beyond embracing the UUA principles and sources, congregations may choose to create and adopt one of their own, and encourage groups within to create and adopt a covenant to guide the interaction between and among its members.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST PRINCIPLES

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST 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 that 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.

WORKSHOP 1B – THE LOCUS OF MORAL AUTHORITY HANDOUT

ACTIVITY 1 – CREATNG A GROUP COVENANT

UUCJ GROUP COVENANT SAMPLES

UUCJ BOARD COVENANT

We, the members of the Board of Directors of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, agree to enter into this covenant, promising one another our mutual trust and support to carry our responsibilities.

- We will make decisions to carry out the goals and objectives of our Church with concern for its overall vitality.
- We will be guided by long range planning, balancing the needs and challenges of our members, programs, staff, facilities, and finances.
- We will treat each other, Board member, staff, or Congregant, with respect.
- We will actively look for all points of view on important issues.
- We will honor dissenting views, agreeing to disagree, when discussing issues within the Board.
- We will work with the other members of the Board to express our point of view in a constructive way when we feel we cannot support a Board decision.
- We will maintain confidentiality when requested.
- The Board Secretary will send out an agenda and supporting documents at least seven days before the upcoming Board meeting.
- We will respect freedom of speech and the responsibility of our positions.
- We will not use contemptuous or critical speech about our fellow members, Congregants, or paid staff.
- We will be supportive of each other's efforts and will give freely of encouragement and praise.

UUCJ ADULT RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEAM (ARET) COVENANT

The members will:

- Abide by the UUCJ Covenant.
- Honor the seven UU principles.
- Practice effective communications skills:
- Afford all members the opportunity to speak freely,
- Listen to one another openly and respectfully,
- Offer appropriate feedback courteously and graciously,
- Address the viability of an idea, not the person offering it,
- Strive for issue resolution through consensus.
- Abide by Committee governance:
- Attend at least 75% of the scheduled meetings,
- Give notice to the Chair if unable to attend a meeting,
- Come to the meetings prepared and ready to address agenda items,
- Address difficult issues through offering positive resolutions.

WORKSHOP 1B – THE LOCUS OF MORAL AUTHORITY HANDOUT

ACTIVITY 1 – CREATNG A GROUP COVENANT

INSTRUCTIONS

Consider that in Jewish and mainstream Christian traditions, adherents covenant with God, or in the presence of God. Their ethical authority foundational to the covenant is God. Ask yourself, "Where does the ethical authority that is foundational to our covenant rest? Why?" Then,

Turn to a partner

- Take five minutes and share what you listed in your journal in reference to how group members should treat one another.
- Agree on the top two guidelines that should be included in your covenant.
- After five minutes, return to the group and report on the two guidelines you and your partner agreed should be adopted.
- Consider the guidelines proposed by each group, and after 10 minutes, agree on what will be included in your group covenant.

This covenant will apply for the rest of your time together. The covenant will be typed up and distributed to all participants by a workshop facilitator.