

Unitarian worship service on 17 October 2010 led by Barry Bell

Unitarians and worship - a personal view

The primary requirements for being a Unitarian, as I understand them and as they attracted me to the movement in the first place, are valuing the freedom to hold your own personal faith free of creed and dogma and commitment to allowing every individual the same freedom to follow their own spiritual path.

These are much more open than those of any other religion or spiritual movement that I know of. They are at the heart of what has become known as the liberal religious view. This view can be, and is, taken by individuals within all religions and spiritual movements, but is obviously restricted by any creedal demands of their particular faith community.

Unitarianism is not the only religious denomination which claims to be non-creedal, but it is the only one in the UK which is evolving into being truly creedless. It had already become wider than a liberal Christian denomination which was open only to those who were happy to describe themselves as Christian.

It is nominally still liberal Christian, but now open (with that limitation) to Christians **and** others. Its collection of autonomous religious and spiritual communities now however include many like ours which are in practice united through the freedom to find worth and meaning in all experience **rather** than through “being” Christian - or “being” anything else for that matter.

I am a Unitarian precisely because of this absence of any creedal demand to accept one particular view of the possible forces in, around, and beyond us- which many would use the shorthand form “God” to encompass - as being the only one to hold truth, or even as being necessarily the best of a range of views which hold parts of the truth.

But this brings challenges. Is it then a separate religion? Is it even a religion at all, or is it best thought of as a spiritual movement? What binds us without creed? How do individual Unitarians relate to those others, including fellow Unitarians, whose personal faiths are very different to their own? How and what do we worship?

Today I am considering the last of these.

We must first look at what worship is. Help is to be found in the fact that the term “worship” is a shortened form of the word “worthship”.

Unitarians worship in this broader sense, through the ongoing process of seeking out and valuing that which is of worth, often referring to this as finding meaning in life. We are free as individuals to find worth and meaning from within the entirety of human experience. It is indeed this shared freedom, rather than shared creed or shared personal faith, which unites us.

This need to find meaning in life is universal. I see it as a key part of human spirituality, closely related to our sense of the divine and to our sense of interconnection.

Unitarians understand that when we find something of worth and meaning to us it is all too easy to then erect divisions between us and our fellow man. We feel the need to challenge the often divisive and damaging positions taken by fundamentalists of every persuasion, and to seek harmony through the valuing of our common humanity and common spirituality.

I find that for me successful worship of this kind depends on two things. It depends on remaining open to my own spirituality and to the spirituality of others, and it depends on bringing a learning **attitude** to my own experience. It is an ongoing process of betterment.

For me, it's not about becoming perfect or all-knowing, it's not about finding a "right for all time" set of rules to impose on others, it's not just about self-sacrifice and doing good, and it's certainly not about personal salvation in the sense of defeating death.

It's about trying to become a better human being, about identifying behaviours which help me towards this and finding the courage to apply these, about accepting my failures and learning from them, about accepting the failures of others and helping them rather than judging them, about both finding and enabling happiness here on earth.

It is an ongoing process of betterment, founded in shared human spirituality, which is uniting rather than divisive. It is worth shouting about.