



JOURNEY IN... YEAR TWO

THE NATURE OF GOD

KINESTHETIC

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- Our Unitarian Universalist faith asserts that each individual has a capacity for and birthright to an original experience of God. We seek no intercessors, no dogma, no special assignation of grace or salvation. God is immediately available to everyone.
- Prayer and meditation are ways to interact directly with God.
- There's a big difference between direct experience and indirect understanding.

Lesson Materials

- Blindfolds
- Obstacle Course items: plastic cups, or paper blocks
- Target: fabric or paper labeled "God" or "Truth"

TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

Let me admonish you, first of all, to go alone; to refuse the good models, even those which are sacred in the imagination of men, and dare to love God without mediator or veil. Friends enough you shall find who will hold up to your emulation [...] Thank God for these good men, but say, 'I also am a man.' Imitation cannot go above its model. The imitator dooms himself to hopeless mediocrity. The inventor did it, because it was natural to him, and so in him it has a charm. In the imitator, something else is natural, and he bereaves himself of his own beauty, to come short of another man's.

- from R.W.Emerson's *Divinity School Address*

Our age is retrospective[...] It writes biographies, histories, and criticism. The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? The sun shines to-day also [...] There are new lands, new men, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.

- from *Nature* by R. W. Emerson

Believe nothing, no matter where you read it, or who said it, no matter if I have said it, unless it agrees with your own reason and your own common sense.

-Buddha

Reflective question for teachers:

Where in your life have you sought and perhaps found an "original relation to the universe? What are your experiences with prayer and meditation?

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- For large groups, make the obstacle course short and sweet. This will allow time for each child to do the course.
- With younger children, you might want to keep the course the same for each child. With fifth and sixth graders, you might find it more interesting to alter the course a little for each child.
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YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES

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CHECK-IN

🕒 5 minutes

Allow the Journey Guide to lead the group in a name game, an icebreaker, a get-to-know-you questions or a simple ‘How are things?’ moment.

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE OBSTACLE COURSE

🕒 25-30 minutes

- Children will attempt to navigate an obstacle course toward a ‘prize’ while blindfolded. Other children on their team will guide them by talking them through the obstacles. Large groups can be divided into two teams, allowing two children to navigate courses simultaneously. The goal of this activity is to create an experiential metaphor, essentially asking the question, “Is it better for us to find our own way, or to have other people tell us how to get where we’re going?”
- Set up an obstacle course of plastic cups and foam blocks. At the end of the course, place a target for each child to grab, perhaps a cloth with the word “God” or “Truth” printed on it. Be creative with the ‘prize’. Outline the course ‘zone’ on the floor with colored tape. If a child knocks over a block or cup or steps outside the zone, they can be sent to the start line. Group size and time limits may constrain teachers not to have consequences for knocking over cups or blocks.
- Blindfold the child who will navigate the course. Encourage the other children to guide that child through the course, moving around obstacles toward the goal. Allow the activity to unfold: kids may all talk at once, the child who is ‘it’ may try to peek. Older kids may try to give faulty directions. These sorts of things can be unpacked as part of the metaphor.
- When every child has had a chance to try his or her path to the prize, select one child to demonstrate how simple it is to navigate the course on one’s own, eyes open. Finally, clear away the obstacle course and gather in a circle to reflect.

Wondering Together:

Encourage the kids to unpack the metaphor together. Guide the discussion with questions like the following:

- Why is it easier to get to the prize on your own? What made the blindfolded course so challenging?
- What’s easier, an obstacle course made of cups or figuring out what you believe about God?

HELPFUL ONLINE VIDEOS OF PRAYER GESTURES:

- Jewish prayer: <http://www.jewfaq.org/liturgy.htm#Movements>
- Muslim prayer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBzAtcFcnVQ&feature=related>

- In our Unitarian Universalist tradition, do we try to tell each other how to find God? Why or why not? If so, is it because other people can't figure God out for themselves and need our help? What DO we talk about with each other when it comes to God?
- Are there things 'in the way' between people and a direct experience of the Universe, like the little obstacles in our course? What can stop a person from figuring out God for themselves?
- If we're seeking God, do you think that hitting an 'obstacle' means we have to go back to the beginning? What would that mean?
- What have your experiences of God or search for God been like?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY TWO

BODY PRAYERS

🕒 20 minutes

- Share this Aramaic definition of prayer with the children: "prayer is the opening of oneself to the sacred, to be filled up, inside and out". Introduce the idea that nearly all faith traditions involve the entire body in prayer. Model each and afterward, ask the kids to reflect with the Wondering Together questions. This experience should be taken seriously and personally. We must not allow mockery of another group's beliefs; each person's beliefs are all that they have.
- Christians often pray on their knees. Hand can be folded or pressed together at the level of the heart or the forehead. Catholic Christians make the sign of the cross on their bodies after prayer as a reminder.
- Muslims prostrate themselves during prayer (the *Saalat*) five times daily. The positions are as follows: The worshipper begins in a standing position facing Mecca. Raise the hands to the ears and then cross them, right over left, over the heart (females) or below the navel (males). Bend over and place the hands on the knees, looking down at the feet. Stand straight, arms at the sides. Drop to the knees and prostrate fully, placing the hands and forehead on the floor, elbows up. Sit up on knees, eyes turned down. Prostrate once again and return to the sitting position.
- Judaism also has a special way to bow during prayer. First, you stand. Then you bend at the knees, still keep the head and back erect. Next, bend forward at the waist until the back is parallel with the ground, all while straightening the knees. After a person reads a prayer or words from the Torah, listeners reach toward the scroll with their pinky finger and then kiss the finger.
- Buddhists often meditate in the half-lotus position. Seated, the sole of the left foot is placed on the inside of the right thigh. The right foot is drawn over the left leg and tucked into the fold of the left knee, against the left thigh. Hands are placed palm up on the knees, often with the thumb and ring finger touching. Hands can also be cupped, right over left, thumbs touching, and held about four fingers' width below the navel.
- In our congregation, during prayer, some people bow their heads, some look up and some look straight ahead. Some people pray with eyes open, some eyes closed. Many people pray with their hands open loosely, palms up, in their lap. Next time you're in the Sanctuary for a Story or Family Sunday, look around and watch how people pray.

CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING

🕒 2-5 minutes

Let's not use someone else's prayer this time. We can make up our own.

On the first Sunday of this cycle, the guide and teacher should allow the children to create a closing prayer for each other, one that encourages the kids to remember to trust their own direct experience of God and to remember each other as fellow travelers on the path.

“What can we say to each other and to the whole Universe when we leave this group to encourage each other to be courageous and trust our own hearts and minds to figure God out?”

Ask for some ideas and come to a consensus; **be sure to write down the words for next week and put them in the Journey Guide's folder so that the group can have a set closing.**

Repeat this closing week after week, hands joined, in a circle.