

COMING OF AGE, AGAIN  
Credos by Participants in the Coming of Age, Again Program  
Sunday, August 18, 2019  
All Souls Church, New York City

**Darcy Smith**

Hi, I am Darcy - I am a UU as well as an ACOA. I came to believe a power greater than me could restore me to sanity. That definitely wasn't always the case. I was baptized and grew up as a United Methodist. Well sort of. I only really remember going on holidays. I was raised in an upper class suburban town in Connecticut. I never really felt like I fit in. I had a visual impairment, wasn't into team sports and usually stuck to myself or my small group of friends in the Drama Club. That usually consisted of the kids that came from less money or people of color.

In Ridgefield, I used to wonder things like, why was there only one or two black families in our grade, no Asian restaurants? And why did some of the teachers and students have to make such a big deal when my parents had them put up white boards in all my class rooms to help me with my school work? It was a lot of stress on me to feel and be different. Ridgefield, although beautiful, never felt like home. The Greater New York area and All Souls have always been more of a home to me than that little area of suburban Connecticut.

The thing in my life that have given me the most meaning and purpose has been my UU faith. I have always gravitated towards social justice events and young adults events. I'll never forget my first UU event with my best friend in high school, who was UU. She invited me to go on a Midnight Run with her high school youth group here in the city. My mom was going to UU stuff at that time in a nearby town. But, I was in the midst of teenage rebellion at that time, and wasn't feeling the parental figures at the time, but it stuck with me that she came to find UU as a beacon of hope. I came to our beloved liberal faith much more zealously in 2004-2005. I was still in Connecticut but living a few towns over. It was a bit better and more diverse. I was involved in anti-racism and immigration issues at UUCD, and was starting to feel truly welcomed and part of a spiritual community.

I have met some of my dearest friends through UU communities starting with UU Danbury, Star Island and now here at All Souls. I decided to officially sign the membership book after 45 was elected. I'm looking to branch out and try new things in this community and getting to know more of you. My conviction for social justice and anti-racism, and all isms is very much a part of my spirituality. It's particularly pivotal in this day and age of absolutely alarming unrest. I have been looking to deepen my own relationship with a higher power I call god and our beloved counterpart Mother Earth over the last five years during and since my divorce. I believe that my god is a kind, loving, nonjudgmental, non-denominational god that is with me every step of the way. I chose to believe that he shutters in agony at the injustices and violence done in this world past and present.

Words that always ring true to me are the seven principles particularly 1, 2, 3, 4

1. 1st Principle: The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. 2nd Principle: Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. 3rd Principle: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

4. 4th Principle: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

Why Unitarian Universalism? Despite some diversions in more conservative faiths to appease the man I was with at the time, my own search for truth and meaning always takes me back to UU one way or another. I am certain now that my heart and soul is, always was and always will be UU.

### **Shanell Lockhart**

Good Morning. My name is Shanell Hyacinth Camelle Lockhart. I never really considered myself a “church person.” If you had told me years ago that I would be standing in church, on Sunday speaking in front of the congregation, I would have told you to have your head examined, despite the fact that this is exactly what my parents always wanted for me. I was raised by Anglican and Methodist parents from the Caribbean, in a house where a big portrait of Jesus and his disciples presided over our dinner table each night, and hymns quietly streamed from the ancient radio on top of the refrigerator. All Jesus, all the time. Despite their faith, my parents were never quite able to get their “heathen” Yankee children into church. They tried morning church, afternoon church, night church. Nope, nope, nope. My brother and I had a zero tolerance policy when it came to church.

As I got older though, I realized that I needed... something. There was a piece of me that envied friends that had grown up in the church; they had a supportive community, and a certain kind of clarity about how they should live their lives. I on the other hand, was living the gospel of the overachiever: stellar grades, sports, chorus, school plays. And then, January of my senior year of high school, my mother died. I don't think a heathen had ever prayed so hard before. But no amount of “laying on of hands” could stop cancer's onslaught, and she was gone a few months after her diagnosis. No years of mental preparation or long goodbyes, but thankfully, no debilitating chemo either. Needless to say, God and me were not friends. If you can't or won't protect your faithful flock, what good are you?

I went away to Brown University that August and buried myself in what I did best, school. Years of college, grad school, working and therapy later, I'm still trying to find my answers. All Souls is a big part of that process. All are welcome, questions are encouraged, bring your anger and your confusion, we'll help you figure it out, or give you the space to work it out yourself. In addition to the (short and sweet!) services, Young Adults brunches, Coffee Hour conversations, mindfulness mornings and 'Coming of Age, Again' evenings, all help me to think a little more deeply about what matters to me. I'm still working on it, but here's what I've got so far.

I believe that there is something larger than me in this world and beyond it. Mysterious, not necessarily sentient (though perhaps it is), an energy that runs through all things. I am Creator and Created, powerful and part of this divine source. I feel it when awe-inspired, and small in the face of nature, I see it in the faces of the people and pets I love. We are souls having a human experience, and the purpose of this experience is to grow and evolve. Religion and spirituality take many forms; there is wisdom in all of them. They help us connect to this divine source, whether we call it God or a myriad of other names, and that connection helps us feel whole. Spirituality brings us closer to one another in community, but also closer to understanding ourselves.

I believe that the world can be random and cruel, but that people are capable of great acts of kindness and the arc of the moral universe does bend eventually towards justice. I believe that

people with access to power have a responsibility to serve and support the people without it. I believe that power should be given to those who can wield it with both humility and courage, and who are wise enough to know that they are always learning.

I believe that love, laughter and kindness make the world go around. Thank you all for making me welcome, this Sunday and every Sunday.

### **Willard Knox**

These are my seven principles:

1. If I'm not here to love, why am I here?
2. If I'm not fighting for others, who will stand up for me?
3. If I disrespect myself, how can I honor god?
4. I must live as though I will have to answer for everything I've done or failed to do in my life.
5. Thank your crossing guard.
6. Feed and water your animals first.
7. Love can surprise you.

This I believe.

### **Jane Levenson**

My name is Jane Levenson. I have been a member of All Souls for over 50 years, attending since childhood, adding up to 70 or so years.

I believe that it is good to pause from time to time and reconsider foundational beliefs, and key values and guideposts for living a meaningful life – both as an individual and as part of community with kinship to all.

I believe that, though a faith community is not necessary, it is my preferred choice for community sharing and learning while fine-tuning individual beliefs and action choices. A general covenantal bonding with freedom to be individuals works for me and Unitarian Universalism works for me best.

That said, I like the concept of the "Cathedral of the World" as Forrest Church put it: one Truth, one Light, many windows with a variety of refractions and reflections. So while Unitarian Universalism works best for my thinking and beliefs, I truly know many others with differing windows who are caring, intelligent, fully respectful of all people and close to my values. I believe that all of good will who view the Ultimate – God, the Ineffable, Allah or whatever – and strive for the Light are equally valid, even if not all windows are equally suitable for me.

Happily for me, the Unitarian Universalist Association promotes seven fine principles of which two stand out in special ways.

First for me as a foundational belief is, "respect for the independent web of all existence, of which we are a part." This is more than just respect for the environment or for all people, though those two aspects are critical. It also reflects our true interdependence on each other, on all forms of life and our ever-evolving interaction with all. Therefore, I am not supreme as an individual or species but not fully dependent as I play a part in this unfolding. I cannot see in all parts of the spectrum of light; I do not hear in all decibels; I cannot start a food chain. Thus, I'm also quite sure my brain cannot fully understand the "all in all." This leads to a sense of awe, reverence and humility when being my better self.

So while humans are not the only important part of life, I am a human who is alive and knows I must die. This ability to know calls forth many choices and capabilities within limitation. Most specially, I value "the inherent worth and dignity of every person" as a core belief. I can understand differing opinions about specifics of economy or details of many programs even though I have opinions on them. But I cannot accept hatred or even derision of anyone for details of birth or life such as religion, color, gender, social status and disability. So the many issues related to the many forms of divisiveness and derision are important to me. Acting on these can be collective or case-by-case or small scale but they matter.

The great quote from Micah says, "What does your God require of you? To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Yet justice and mercy are not always in concordance. They are both so important, yet show how difficult some issues can be. I value both but in uncertainty, mercy (and compassion) possibly get my nod.

So, in summary, I am but one part of an interdependent web and the inherent worth and dignity of every person is key to me. A mix of easier and more complex choices follow for my actions and time. Some will take priority and some priorities will change. Others will make good priorities for their time. Beyond bigger choices, I can value those with whom I cross paths each day. Simple kindnesses, caring and sharing are available each day and brighten the day as well.

In these things, I believe.

## **Judith Moldover**

Good morning and thank you for joining us this morning for worship at All Souls. I am Judith Moldover, raised by two devout atheists. We attended an extremely reform Jewish temple, and I was sent to a Quaker school run by a Northern Irish Protestant. My family celebrated Christmas, Hanukkah, and Passover. Clearly, I was a Unitarian in the making. How I found my way to this wonderful community of open hearts and minds is a story for another day; I will just say that I am profoundly grateful that I did. Hoping to learn more about Unitarian Universalism, I signed up for this adult Coming of Age group. What I learned is that we each have the privilege, and the responsibility, of deciding what we believe. But what we believe about... what?

What do I believe about the cosmos?

I believe that the universe is so boundless and so infinite that no human can ever understand it. Big Bang or Steady State, what came before it? How does it have no beginning and no end? And

if there was a first day, a first bang that still reverberates through time and space, what existed in the second before it? And what is at the edge of the universe? How can it go on forever? What is on the other side? I believe that the dimensions of the Universe are the ultimate mystery that no human will ever know. I believe that humanity will never ever stop seeking the answer, whether through myth or science or religion. And I love humanity for that heroic quest.

What do I believe about a supreme being?

I believe that the old-fashioned thought of a benevolent old white guy, sitting among fluffy cumulus clouds with the sun's rays surrounding him, all knowing, all powerful, ultimately beneficent, is so comforting (at least to us white folks). I also believe that that image is an outrageous lie. I know there is no paradise of angelic beings, I know that the universe is cold and dark and empty. Yet I also know, when I hear Bach's music or see it printed on a page, that it cannot merely be by chance that such beauty exists.

What do I believe about human beings?

I believe that human beings are basically good, and only a tiny minority are truly evil.

What do I believe about an individual's life?

I believe that the only bad experience is one that you don't learn from. I believe that we must cherish one another, because we never know when we will never see the people we love again. And no one, no one, can have a meaningful existence without being part of a greater community.

What do I believe about the future?

I believe that justice can never be taken for granted, and that it will prevail. I believe that light follows darkness, that we will survive and one day be joyous again.

All this I believe.