**Small Group Ministry**

**Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church**

June 2, 2015 By Heidi Green

**Welcoming** (2 min) Heidi & Terry

**Opening Reading/Chalice Lighting** (2 min) Terry

I believe in science, I believe in evolution. I cannot get behind some supreme being who weighs in on the Tony Awards while a million people get whacked with machetes. I don’t believe a billion people from India are going to hell. I don’t think we get cancer to learn life lessons, and I don’t believe that people die young because God needs another angel. I think it’s just bullshit, and on some level, I think we all know that. Look, I understand that religion makes it easier to deal with all of the random shitty things that happen to us. And I wish I could get on that ride; I’m sure I would be happier. But I can’t. Feelings aren’t enough. I need it to be real.

*– Piper Chapman (Orange is the New Black)*

**Silent Reflection** (1 min) Heidi

**Personal Sharing** (20 min) Heidi

*30 seconds of silence to gather our thoughts.*

A time to check in for a few moments, to express and then set aside what we carry from our day so that we can be together in mind, body, and spirit.

**Follow-Up Conversation** (20 min) Heidi

**Break** (10 min)

**Atheism** (35 min) Terry

Someone once said “an agnostic is just a cowardly atheist”. *In your view how do atheism and agnosticism really differ?*

With the exception of pantheists—who believe that Nature and God are one and the same thing—theists challenge the idea that nature contains all of reality. Classic Judeo-Christian theism believes natural laws are just secondary causes of God, the first cause. *Is there causation outside of nature in your view?*

Historically atheism usually meant “not-theism” a purely negative term – theism being belief in the supernatural all-powerful and all-good creator and cause of the universe. *Does a denial of theism nevertheless permit belief in a divine principle within nature or humanity?*

A huge proportion of religious believers in the world (Hindus, Buddhists, Taoists) are not troubled at all by the question “does God exist?” *Why is it a troubling question in our society? Can a society prosper if it lacks a strong belief in the existence of the divine?*

Americans (religious or not) overwhelmingly believe in (at least give lip-service to) the Judeo-Christian God, and question the patriotism of atheists. *Is this popular belief connected to a messianic, crusading nature of American foreign policy (outright desire to make all countries become democracies like our own)?*

One of the 7 UU principles reads: “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part”. *Is belief in this principle an acceptable substitute for belief in God (theism)? If one believes that Nature is good and benevolent, and purposeful, what is the source of those things? Is this belief a sufficient basis for finding faith, hope, love, purpose, and meaning in life?*

Freud believed that belief in God was inspired by the illusion that the vast injustice and evil in life would be rectified in an afterlife. *If you reject theism, are you sufficiently facing up to the fact of evil in life?*

**Follow-Up Conversation** (20 min) Heidi

What more do you want to know?

**Wrap Up** (3 min)

Will you continue? Summer? Fall?

**Closing Readings** (2 min) an

Atheism is the knowledge that ghosts don’t exist; death is final; magic is fake; good and evil is relative; and consciousness requires a brain.

*– Anonymous*

Atheism isn’t a religion. It’s a personal relationship with reality.

*– Anonymous*

We are all atheists about most of the gods societies have ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further.

*– Richard Dawkins*