



Introduction

Most religions are what theologians and anthropologists call "syncretic," meaning they absorb parts of whatever they come into contact with and make it their own. When Hinduism met Christianity, it adopted Jesus as one God among many. When Christianity met European paganism, its gods and goddesses became Catholic saints.

Unitarian Universalism is also a syncretic religion. Our foundation is liberal Christianity, but many other religions and philosophies have been brought in. Today we're going to look at two of them – humanism, which entered Unitarianism at the beginning of the 1900s, and paganism, which entered Unitarian Universalism in the 1980s and 1990s.

Paganism has its roots pre-Christian Europe. Pagans believed in many Gods and Goddesses that intervened in the workings of the world. Their ritual celebrations followed the cycles of the seasons and the rhythms of the body. When Christianity moved into Europe, it actively suppressed paganism. For centuries, it was practiced in secret, and preserved in story and song. Paganism began to resurface at a very pivotal time in history. With the rise of second wave feminism in the 1960s and 70s, many saw Christianity as inherently patriarchal and oppressive, and sought to return to pre-Christian forms of religious practice. The rise of environmentalism identified the spiritual need to reconnect with the earth. And finally, greater awareness of multiculturalism and the idea that your roots matter, drew many European Americans into a search for their origins. Unitarian Universalism has a long history involving feminism, environmentalism and a respect for diversity, so it is any surprise that Paganism found its way here?

Humanism asserts the dignity and worth of humans and their capacity for self-realization through reason. It often rejects any belief in a supernatural power and holds up the cultivation of reason and rationality as the most important thing. Since its beginning, American Unitarianism also held up reason and rationality as important and encouraged critical thinking about everything. Both were skeptical of too much emotion, both believed in the power of reason, both questioned blind acceptance of tradition. When humanism came into Unitarianism, many were threatened by the idea of religion without God and did everything they could to keep the humanists out. But by the 1950s, humanism had pretty much displaced Christianity in Unitarianism. More than half a century later, Humanist Unitarian Universalism remains strong, and continues to be marked by an emphasis on the mind, a sense that humans and humans only are responsible for what happens in the world, a distrust of tradition, and a suspicion of any claim that there is a supernatural force outside of humanity.

So can you imagine what happened when Paganism and Humanism met in Unitarian Universalism? Paganism has a whole range of gods and goddesses, humanism has no god at all. Paganism is ritualistic and concerned with preserving tradition. Humanism is suspicious of tradition and ritual. Paganism often focuses on emotions and the senses. Humanism is highly rational and focused on the mind. So I think it would be safe to say, it was a difficult meeting. Some Humanists accused Pagans of being superstitious, flighty and irrational. Some Pagans accused Humanists of being emotionless and sterile. Both accused the other of threatening the very foundations of Unitarian Universalism. Humanists said Pagans undermined the tradition of reason and rationality. Pagans said that the Humanists had betrayed the Unitarian Universalist tradition of openness, acceptance, and tolerance.



The battle raged on through the 1980s and 1990s, and by the turn of the millennium, many were realizing that in this battle we had not been our best selves. In fact, many had betrayed our second principle – to affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Clearly, humanism was going to remain a prominent force in Unitarian Universalism. Clearly, paganism had touched a wellspring of deep spiritual need among our people. We had to find a way to live together, even to embrace each other. It was time for a new way.

The play you are about to see was developed for a workshop sponsored by the Coven of Unitarian Universalist Pagans. The goal was to find common ground, and the way they did that, was through humor. Sometimes the best way to find peace is to be able to laugh at ourselves. So the Pagans put on a skit that made fun of paganism. The Humanists put on a skit that made fun of humanism. And then, everyone sat together and talked about how paganism and humanism complimented each other, making Unitarian Universalism a much richer religion. Peace and reconciliation was sought in the spirit of our first principle, to truly affirm and promote everyone's inherent worth and dignity. So it is with great pleasure that we present for you.

Humanism and Paganism: Can This Marriage Be Saved?

(To listen to and hear the original go to <http://archive.uua.org/ga/ga00/239.html> .)

(The Priestess 1 and Priestess 2 start by putting artificial flower garlands on each other's shoulders)

Circle Casting *(Priestess 1 carries knife and circle)*

Priestess 1: I conjure thee, O Circle of power
that thou beest a boundary between
all the nasty, icky, frightening stuff in the world
and all the kind hearted, good natured beings within.

Priestess 2: Let us summon the spirits of the four directions:

Priestess 2: Powers of the North by Southwest
The direction of bad ideas and false starts:
We light this candle to honor you
Come forth to our gathering and bless us
Help us get this off the ground --
Even if it takes a while!

Priestess 1: Powers of the West by Northeast
once upon a time we invoked your presence
with a colored candle
a special blessing
and a song.
We don't know the color of the candle anymore,
and we've forgotten the blessing,
and no one can sing the song...



But since this is the direction of naive idealism
we trust that if we tell the story
you will come.

Priestess 2: Powers of the South by Northwest
guardians of interruptions and frustrations
with this light we summon you...
. . .sort of
with this light we summon you...

Priestess 1: Powers of the east byumm...
East by . . . Southwest
Direction of . . . of . . . forgetfulness
Come forth
Or no --- guardian of amnesia
Come forth!
come forth and . . . come forth and . . .
oh yeah --- bless us and protect us
protect us from ... hmm.... from bad stuff...
er, ...and from too much remembering...
well, you know

Please rise as you are able for that great hymn of all time "Gimme that Old Time Religion"

Sing "Gimme that Old Time Religion"

*Song - Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
Give me that old time religion,
It's good enough for me.*

*We will worship like the Druids,
Running naked through the woo-ids,
And drink strange, fermented fluids,
And it's good enough for me.*

Chorus

*We will worship Zarathustra,
We will pray just like we usta,
And be Zarathustra boostas,
And it's good enough for me.*

Chorus



*Let us pray to Aphrodite,
Cause she's cute and rather flighty
And she wears that funny nightie
And it's good enough for me.*

Chorus

*We all will worship Loki
He's the Norse god of chaos
Which is why this verse doesn't rhyme or scan,
And it's good enough for me.*

Chorus

Priestess 2: In this ritual, we bless each other with the elements of the earth and the forces of nature.

(In the following sequence, they start by gently tossing flower petals, pulled from a paper bag, but as the scene proceeds they move from gentle tossing to hurling them at one another.)

Priestess 1: In the name of the goddess, I bless you with sunshine
Priestess 2: In the name of the great god, I bless you with soft breezes
Priestess 1: In the name of the goddess, I bless you with gentle rain
Priestess 2: In the name of the god, I bless you with the power of thunderstorms
Priestess 1: In the name of the great goddess, I bless you with the power of drought
Priestess 2: In the name of the god, I bless you with locusts
Priestess 1: In the name of the great goddess, I bless you with mosquitoes
Priestess 2: In the name of the great god, I bless you with congregational meetings!

(Pause, look around)

Priestess 1: Let us begin our ritual of identification with the earth.

All please rise
Face the front of the room
Let us call this direction
Dawn
Now, turn to your left, and let us call this direction
Noon
Now turn to the back of the room and let us call that direction
Dusk
Now turn again to your left and let us call that direction
Night
Turn again
We can also call this direction
East



and noon can also be
South
and dusk can also be
West
and night can also be
North
Turn to the front again
and dawn or east can be
Summer
and noon or south can be
Fall
and dusk or west can be
Winter
and night or north can be summer.

Again (speeding uP: the delivery, until everyone is turning fast enough to make them dizzy):

dawn
noon
dusk
night
east
south
west
north
summer
fall
winter
spring

Priestess 2: Our ritual is concluded (*Reaches into jumble on table, pulls out extension cord or power strip*)

Let the power we have raised
be safely grounded
that we may not carelessly carry it
out into the world
but return it into the great cycle of energy
known by many names:

Ameren UE
Manitoba Hydro
Duke Power
Pacific Gas and Electric
Commonwealth Edison
Rocky Mountain Energy...



In the name of these,
Be grounded!

(Plugs extension cord back into itself)

Priestess 1: Thus we end this ritual
thus we release the spirits
thus we open the circle

Priestess 2: Merry meet, and merry part, and merry meet again...

Humanist Skit

(Begin with very formal classical music)

P: *(Sets out chalice with expression of embarrassment)*
(Chalice is a blue plastic candle on an upside down Styrofoam cup) Good Morning. I'm Patrick, a member of the board of the First Unitarian Society -- where our thought is formal but our dress is not.

(Steps out of pulpit to display Hawaiian shirt, shorts, and rope sandals)

I want to welcome you to our gathering and talk today. But before the talk, we have a few announcements...well, actually, it's quite a long list of announcements. Joan, could you help me with these?

Coffee is available during the talk at the back of the hall. Please feel free to get some whenever you like. But do be careful. Last week someone spilled a double latte into the collection and it ruined the two checks in the basket.

J: The Sunday Coordinating Committee has received a number of concerned "opinions" about the sudden influx of unusual ritual into our Sunday gatherings. So we will suspend lighting the chalice on Sunday morning until the committee has a chance to explore the issue in more depth.

The facilities committee has been deliberating on the question of whether to install a few cots in the back of the hall for those who tire prematurely during the Sunday morning Talk Back sessions. We know how they do tend to go on sometimes. The deadline for the decision was today, but the committee has requested more time to sleep on the issue.

The children's education committee wants to announce its new fall line-up of classes. For the smallest ones, there is Aristotle for Toddlers. Younger grade school children will be studying Civil Disobedience and Social Justice in the Sandbox. Older children will study Plato and Play Dough. The high school class will explore the ethical analysis of the musical aesthetic of Mariah Carey as compared to that of the early Amadeus Mozart...Provided we can get any of the High School age teens to show up this time.



P: We also want to announce that after many months of study, the Pigeon Control Committee has found an effective way to clean the pigeon pooP: from our stoop. Thank God!

Megan: Mommy, she said God!

Susan: Hush, we don't use that kind of language in public!

P: Let's continue with an inspirational reading from Bertrand Russell's classic, "The Problems of Philosophy."

J: Reading-Joan – read read read read read read read read. Thank you.

P: We did have a talk scheduled today on "False Epistemologies and the Improbability of Possible Worlds." But I'm afraid the announcements were too long and we don't have time for the talk. We will, therefore, proceed directly to the Talk Back session, for those of you who want to talk about the lack of a talk.

J: Our talk next Sunday is very exciting. It is titled "Wave or Particle: The Nature of Light and its Effects on Human Social Identity Construction in a Post-Modern Society of Deconstructed Political/Economic Systems in the Midst of National and Global Paradigm Shift."

P: I can't wait.

Usually we now close with our song of the morning. However, the Sunday Gathering Committee has become concerned about our inability to agree on any of the words to most of the songs. Consequently, they've decided to limit our song choices to the one selection upon which all of us could agree with the words. The words are printed on this sheet. Please rise and join in.

Hymn:

Chorus / Coffee, Coffee, Coffee

Coffee, Coffee, Coffee. Praise the strength of coffee. Early in the morn we rise with thoughts of only thee. Brewed fresh or reheated, Dark by thee defeated Brewed fresh by perk, or drip or instantly

Though all else we scoff we Come to church for coffee; If we're late to congregate, we come in time for thee. Coffee our one ritual, Drinking it habitual, Brewed black by perk or drip or instantly.

Coffee the communion Of our Uni-Union, Symbol of our sacred ground, our one necessity. Feel the holy power At our coffee hour, Brewed black by perk or drip or instantly. words by Christopher Raible

P: That's it. Let's pour the coffee!



Reflection

Sometimes the practice of paganism can be flighty and disorganized even as it seeks to resurrect traditions that are thousands of years old. And sometimes humanism becomes stale and uninspiring. But, both humanism and paganism have brought great things into Unitarian Universalism.

Humanism gave Unitarian Universalism a way to talk about how deeply responsible we are for our world. The spirit of life is us and our purpose is to serve this beautiful and flawed world. It is a religious journey to learn and expand our minds and test our ideas and beliefs. Humanism deepened Unitarian Universalism's commitment to be a religious democracy. Everyone counts. This is why our congregational meetings are so important. We are the stewards of what has been entrusted to us. .

Paganism gave Unitarian Universalism a way to walk into mystery. It brought into full view our need for ritual, tradition, a sense of reverence and profound awe for this incredible world. Paganism allowed Unitarian Universalists to look outside themselves for comfort and something to hold on to. It allowed us to move away from being only mind, and also body. We are whole human beings – mind, body, and spirit, and paganism helped us to see that we need that kind of balance in our lives.

Both Paganism and Humanism can become fundamentalist, rigid, and unbending, and we have seen that happen with both. But, this has nothing to do with paganism and humanism and everything to do with being human. At our best, we do great things. We are generous, optimistic, and filled with gratitude. At our worst, we are defensive and judgmental, especially when we feel threatened.

So often we think that the response to difference and change is to protect what we are comfortable with. This way of being is very powerful today. Lines are being drawn in the sand all over the place – with regard to immigration, national security, religious differences, patriotism, you name it. All those lines are being drawn out of fear.

But our religious tradition calls us to respond to difference and change not with fear, but with gratitude and open arms, and a desire to understand.

Let me give you an example of how that kind of gratitude and understanding could work right here. Say, you're sitting in worship, and it's not working for you. Perhaps you're an agnostic or an atheist and you hear the word God, and you don't like it. Perhaps you're a theist and you don't hear God anywhere and you feel a sense of emptiness. Often, after Sunday worship I'll have people come to me and say what was wrong with a particular service. One Sunday I'll hear that there was too much God. The next Sunday I'll hear that there wasn't any. What I have learned is that it is impossible to please everyone and that every worship service will speak more to some than to others. It's just what's going to happen in a religion like ours with so much theological diversity. So what are we to do? I suggest that the answer is to cultivate a change in attitude, a change that brings us more into alignment with our principles and closer to the wholeness each of us hungers for.

What if the religious and spiritual needs of your neighbor became just as important as your own? For example, imagine you're in the midst of worship, and that twinge of discomfort or emptiness or frustration sets in, and you start thinking, "What about me? When am I going to get what I want?" try



thinking something like this: "I'm feeling discomfort. This worship service isn't exactly meeting my needs, but I'm going to trust that someone else here is being nurtured by this. It may not be me, right now, but I will rejoice with my neighbor because they are getting what they need, and I can't be whole if that's not happening."

We live in a society that separates us from each other in so many ways. We are one of the loneliest societies on the planet. We are in deep spiritual need of feeling our profound connections to one another, and that must start here, in our houses of worship, where we come hoping to get that deeper connection. But this is the thing... no one can give that connection to you. You have to open yourself to it, and that opening happens through the deliberate cultivation of compassion and generosity. If you are willing to cultivate the kind of generosity and compassion I've suggested here, every worship service will become a time of deepening regardless of what is said or done, because you have made it so. You have moved beyond your own isolated self and joined in holy communion with something much larger than you, and that's what wholeness is.

This is what we're called to. This is unconditional love. This is being the religion we say we are. So as you go forth from this place, look to your neighbor, see in that neighbor your own eyes, your own beating heart, your own deepest needs and desires, and be profoundly grateful.

Amen and blessed be.