

unitarian views of God

I find God in various forms, in wind, water, bird and song which has been my safe guard on many occasions, three the most memorable. My poem ended – it is your love Holy Spirit, Dearest God – is my deep feeling that God is with me always.

Janet M Ford

When people talk about God, all too often the question is couched in terms of belief, “Do you believe in God?” which first and foremost is an uninteresting question and second of all has no real place in a Unitarian context or a post-modern world.

I see the world through God, or try. I seek God in everything, especially living creatures. I love God, my radically immanent God and my spiritual practice is about trying to make space, sometimes silence to feel that presence:

“For I greet him the days I meet him and bless when I understand.”

Gerard Manley Hopkins

God exists between, in relationship, in movement. The moment God becomes an object, a thing to possess and argue over then we are worshipping an idol.

Finding God in the world of natural beauty is relatively easy and a great source of consolation and nourishment to those of us that do. Finding God in ugliness, in pain, even in one another can be rather more of a challenge but that is the spiritual practice, the edge we work with.

Blaming God for all the sorrows in the world is a common habit, even nowadays. Oddly I have no difficulty with this. We are created radically free, God is not responsible for the choices that we make. And most human suffering is derived from human choices. Sadly.

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We live on a burning ember hurtling through space. The very existence of life seems to depend upon it. Life is change, turbulence, even chaos. God is a part of that, not above it all. I choose to make divinity the lens through which I see and understand the world. It is my choice and I certainly have no difficulty with anyone not making that their choice. But I am, in truth, bored by discussions about belief. And increasingly, my faith is being defined in the media by angry secularists who claim to know and understand the God I allegedly believe in. That, frankly, is even more boring.

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Freedom of belief, and our ability to draw on our unique resources of experience, influences and thought, mean that there can be no one Unitarian view of God.

Unitarian minister Cliff Reed writes in *Unitarian? What's That?*, 'Most Unitarians would use the word 'God' to signify that which they believe to be of supreme worth. God is that which commands ultimate reverence and allegiance. God is the inspiration and the object for those who seek truth in a spirit of humility and openness...Some use the word 'God' to signify the human ideal, the noblest visions and aspirations of humanity against which we measure ourselves. God as an inward presence – the 'still small voice' – means more to many than any external power.'

Unitarian hymns refer to God in many ways, as the traditional 'Maker of all, above, below', 'A voice within our souls,' the 'Pulsing great heart of the Cosmos', the 'Weaver of our lives' design' or the 'Mother of strangeness and grace'. Prayers might simply address the Divine Spirit.

Here four Unitarians provide their personal 'take' on God.

Kate Taylor

I became aware that I no longer believed in a personal God when I was eighteen and about to go to university to study for a degree largely in Judaeo-Christian theology. So I read English instead. Ever since, I have been a humanist, although a strong interest in religions persisted. Honesty has always compelled me to recognise that I was a misfit in every religious group that I subsequently encountered, with one exception, the Unitarian Movement.

Each of us lives with the questions: What am I? Why am I? Is life accidental or purposeful? Does God exist? Belief in a benevolent divine being provides a set of reassuring answers. But one cannot will belief into existence and so many of us concentrate instead on the questions 'How shall I live my life?' 'What are my core values?' 'And what are the best ways to express them?' The search for these takes a lifetime. In Unitarianism, which gave me the freedom to explore these matters without requiring me to subscribe to any particular code of belief, I found myself at home.

I was profoundly relieved to encounter God as neither He nor She but more commonly as something unknowable or a profound silence. To claim simultaneously that a supreme being exists beyond both our language and our comprehension, and yet to persist in attempting to delimit it within terms such as father/mother, creator/goddess seems contradictory to me. But this is a modern perspective. And the fact that I can find great value in the writings of others, both past and present, where such words are weighted with profound significance, shows that I, too, am inconsistent.

I exist in the limbo of doubt, of the 'grand perhaps', the no-man's-land between the certainties of believers and atheists, many of whom strike me as crusaders dedicated to annihilating the opposition. Occupying the middle ground isn't the most comfortable of positions - you are open to attack from both sides. So I need the presence of a community that talks and listens, questions and supports, and, sometimes, stimulates and exasperates me, to feel ethically alive. Religion institutionalizes our spiritual and ethical needs. It isn't the only way to experience awe and wonder. But it is a space in which very many areas of thought, awareness and experience can come together, and where there are no final answers.

Margaret Hamer

When I look back over the years I have become aware that there is something else going on within me as well as my physical being with a mind and a conscience and all the chemicals that make it up.

I don't know whether I would call it a soul because I really don't understand what that is and I wouldn't say that it is God in the fullness of the word. It's a feeling that there is a gentle inner strength deep within me; not interfering with my life journey but helping me to get through each day and night. Some would say that I am just an optimist but it's more than that because I really do feel the presence of the spirit within, this can happen in quiet thoughtful moments and when using all of my senses to connect me with all that nature has to offer, through the arts, and when I meet good people.

I must admit that over the years I have struggled with the word God preferring to use other language such as eternal spirit or universal spirit. The word God seems to me to suggest an external supernatural being looking down from high; whereas eternal spirit speaks to me as a thread that runs through all there is and will be for all time.

However saying all this I must confess that I do feel that I have had some help from time to time throughout my life but I am still trying to come to some understanding of these extraordinary happenings. Maybe as my life goes on I will lessen my resistance to using the word God to describe my spirituality. But does it really matter what I believe about God or the nature of God? If God exists then he/she exists regardless of my reckoning. To try to answer the question is for me to say that I only can tell you how I feel and language limits me in my quest.

Jim Timiney

After being Christened and brought up a Christian within the Unitarian Church, having a mother who was the sixth generation Unitarian Christian and father a Congregationalist gave me a firm understanding of my faith.

During my childhood, I attended Sunday School and Chapel; it wasn't until the age of eight that I had a further understanding of the meaning of God. This took place in the Intermediate Department of Sunday School, where we had bible readings and a card that was entitled "I Believe"; affirmations are as follows : I Believe in-

- * God, who is Spirit, Love and Power, maker and Father of all.
- * Man, the child of God, created and to know and enjoy God for ever.
- * that God speaks to man through his conscience and above all through Jesus.
- * the Kingdom of God being established by our obedience to justice, peace and love.
- * the Unitarian Church as a fellowship of those who seek the Kingdom of God.
- * Eternal Life and that it begins here on Earth.

I have held this belief for many years. I do not see God as having any gender, although I usually use the word him, for convenience. I would never correct anyone in the way they see God, that is their choice, but I know what suits me.

At a workshop preparing a Service for Whitsuntide, my remit was to find a reading that spoke of the "Holy Spirit"; all that kept going around in my head as "the still small voice of calm". Eventually, I scribed the poem "The Spirit Within". This talks of how I see God, something that is deep within me that I cannot understand, it is so deep within, it will cradle all my years. What it is, I cannot express, it gives me joy and loneliness and sometimes emptiness.