



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

Unitarian Universalism

General Information

Unitarian Universalism (UU) is a faith that embraces philosophical and theological diversity, with the result that members identify with and draw inspiration from a variety of religious and secular traditions. Uniting these disparate threads is a set of seven ethical Principles, summarized as “the inherent worth and dignity of every person” (Principle 1) and “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which humanity is a part” (Principle 7).

More information about Unitarian Universalism, including the religion's seven Principles, organizational structure, and history, can be found by going to <http://www.uua.org/>.

Number of members in the US: 586,000*

*Number obtained from [The US Census Bureau](#), 2008 records. The [UUA](#) reports the number of its members to be 219,000 in the US and Canada, 222,000 Worldwide.

Official Statements on Animals

We must make food choices that "minimize the pain and suffering of animals"

- **Unitarian Universalism has a strong social justice component. Although each congregation is free to determine its own justice priorities, an annual meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) provides an opportunity for member congregations to come together to discuss shared goals and vote on statements that express shared social values. Statements that receive majority support are released under the title “Statement of Conscience.”**

In 2011, the UUA approved a Statement of Conscience on "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice." This Statement calls upon members to apply their seven Principles to food choices. Respecting the interdependent web of existence, says the Statement, necessitates "eating ethically" and "enlarging our circle of moral concern to include all living creatures." This, in turn, requires us to "increase our proportion of plant-based food" and to make food choices that "minimize the pain and suffering of animals."

- "Aware of our interdependence, we acknowledge that eating ethically requires us to be mindful of the miracle of life that we share with all beings.

"Ethical eating is the application of our Principles to our food choices. What and how we eat has broad implications for our planet and society. Our values, Principles, and integrity call us to seek compassion, health, and sustainability in the production of food we raise or purchase.

"Food production involving growing, processing, packaging, transporting, and distributing food has become a vast worldwide industry...This mass production has greatly increased food supply, but has resulted in the overuse of fertilizers and pesticides with crops and the mistreatment of animals and workers in food production. Both this overuse and the large waste streams from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) result in pollution of water, land, and air.

"We acknowledge that aggressive action needs to be taken that will ensure an adequate food supply for the world population; reduce the use of energy, water, fertilizer, pesticides, and hormones in food production; mitigate climate change; and end the inhumane treatment of animals. These steps call for an evolution of our eating habits to include more locally grown, minimally processed whole foods. We acknowledge that this evolution must respect diversity in cultures, nutritional requirements, and religious practices.

"[W]e affirm that the natural world exists not for the sole benefit of one nation, one race, one gender, one religion, or even one species, but for all. Working in the defense of mutual interests, Unitarian Universalists acknowledge and accept the challenge of enlarging our circle of moral concern to include all living creatures...

"Recognizing that individual circumstances vary, we aspire to buy, raise, and consume food for ourselves and our families that: 1) increases our proportionate consumption of plant-based food, which increases the global access to calories, provides health benefits, and prevents injuring animals; 2) minimizes the pain and suffering of animals by purchasing meat or seafood produced under humane conditions, for those who choose to eat meat or seafood..."

--from UUA, 2011 Statement of Conscience, [*Ethical Eating: Food & Environmental Justice*](#)

We must become responsible consumers in order to protect vulnerable people and endangered species

- **The 2001 UUA Statement of Conscience, "Responsible Consumption is Our Moral Imperative," declared that industrialized nations like the United States and Canada have a moral imperative to decrease consumption levels of purchased goods. Current levels of unsustainable and "irresponsible consumption," says the Statement, threaten present and future generations of humans and "lead to the extinction of species."**
- "Material comforts that we enjoy in the United States and Canada come at a greater cost than we often realize. Our two countries, together with other industrial nations, consume a disproportionately large share of the natural resource base that sustains life on earth. While the United States and Canada alone account for only 6 percent of the world's population, we consume over 40 percent of the world's resources.
"The hidden cost of irresponsible consumption is often far removed from the point of purchase or use... The ultimate cost includes the price we pay up-front and the hidden price paid by present and future generations when our actions increase human suffering and lead to the extinction of species, degradation of the environment, and depletion of natural resources... We have a responsibility to the earth and all of its creatures. We need to raise to consciousness the moral imperative of responsible consumption habits at home, at work, and in our religious communities... Becoming responsible consumers means putting into

action our religious Principles of the inherent worth and dignity of all people and the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part."

--from UUA, 2001 Statement of Conscience, [Responsible Consumption is Our Moral Imperative](#).

We must protect animal habitats by halting "practices that fuel global warming/climate change"

- In a 2006 Statement of Conscience, the UUA called upon members to protect animal habitats and vulnerable human populations by halting practices that lead to global warming/climate change. "All living organisms," says the Statement, "depend on ecosystems that can be sustained only in relatively narrow temperature ranges."
 - "Earth is our home. We are part of this world and its destiny is our own. Life on this planet will be gravely affected unless we embrace new practices, ethics, and values to guide our lives on a warming planet... We declare by this Statement of Conscience that we will not acquiesce to the ongoing degradation and destruction of life that human actions are leaving to our children and grandchildren. We as Unitarian Universalists are called to join with others to halt practices that fuel global warming/climate change, to instigate sustainable alternatives, and to mitigate the impending effects of global warming/climate change with just and ethical responses... Climatic changes, combined with habitat destruction and pollution, are causing loss of species, forests, human settlements, glaciers, and coastal heritage sites. All living organisms depend on ecosystems that can be sustained only in relatively narrow temperature ranges."
 - from UUA, 2006 Statement of Conscience, [Threat of Global Warming/Climate Change](#).

Historical References on Animals

Louisa May Alcott: Vegetable diets lead to "sweet repose." Flesh diets lead to war and nightmares

- Prior to combining to form Unitarian Universalism, the Unitarian and Universalist traditions attracted and inspired members who were passionate about the welfare of animals and nature. Among these members was Louisa May Alcott (author of *Little Women*), who wrote in her diary that "animal food" leads to war and nightmares while a "vegetable diet" leads to "sweet repose."
 - "Vegetable diet and sweet repose. Animal food and nightmare. Pluck your body from the orchard; do not snatch it from the shambles. Without flesh diet there could be no bloodshedding war."
 - from Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women: Letters from the House of Alcott*, ed. Jessie Bonstelle and Marian deForest (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1914), 184.

Henry David Thoreau: It is the "destiny of the human race...to leave off eating animals"

- According to Henry David Thoreau, author of *Walden*, each animal values its own life as much as each human values his own. For this reason, killing an animal is an act of "wanton...murder." Fortunately, contended Thoreau, "it is the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other..."

- "No humane being, past the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature which holds its life by the same tenure that he does.
 "Is it not a reproach that man is a carnivorous animal? True, he can and does live, in a great measure, by preying on other animals; but this is a miserable way - as anyone who will go to snaring rabbits, or slaughtering lambs, may learn - and he will be regarded as a benefactor of his race who shall teach man to confine himself to a more innocent and wholesome diet. Whatever my own practice may be, I have no doubt that it is a part of the destiny of the human race, in its gradual improvement, to leave off eating animals, as surely as the savage tribes have left off eating each other when they came in contact with the more civilised."
 --from Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: or Life in the Woods* (London: JM Dent & Sons, Ltd and New York: E.P. Dutton & Co, 1908), 187, 190.

Henry Bergh: "Mercy to animals means mercy to mankind"

- **According to Henry Bergh, founder of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA), human beings often ignore the suffering that we inflict upon animals. If we were to take pity on animals, said Bergh, our conscience would gradually awaken to the other forms of injustice that surround us. "Mercy to animals," therefore, also "means mercy to mankind."**
- "That this vast portion of animated nature [animals] could suffer and enjoy seems to have been ignored--not designedly, it is true, but for want of a moral shower...to irrigate and vivify the seed which lay buried in the heart. That great need has been supplied by this Society [the ASPCA], which daily lays bare the wounds which deliberate or thoughtless cruelty inflicts on these uncomplaining friends of ours. Nor does its mission end with this, but through the admonitions of awakened conscience, a more exalted humanity inures to the profit of the superior race, for most assuredly mercy to animals means mercy to mankind."
 --from The Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, "Extracts from Address of Henry Bergh," *Our Dumb Animals*, Vol 5, No. 1, June 1872, p 206.

Contemporary References on Animals

We are related to every living creature. Humans and animals are family

- **Unitarian Universalism's seventh Principle affirms that all life is interconnected. This religious insight is confirmed by science, says the UUA, which reveals that we are composed of the same organic elements as all life forms and thus are "related to every living creature, both plant and animal." It is time that we stop seeing ourselves as separate from and dominant over nature, according to the UUA, and start recognizing that we must "preserve and sustain" our family members.**
- "A new humanism is emerging among Unitarian Universalists, a religious humanism informed by cultural developments and recent discoveries in the natural and human sciences and grounded in the larger context of religious naturalism, a religious humanism that offers depth, meaning, and purpose without sacrificing intellectual honesty or the spiritual dimension... I believe a viable religion of the twenty-first century must include...the

affirmation that human beings are an integral part of nature. We are not separate and distinct from the rest of the natural world; we are part and parcel of it. We are related to every living creature, both plant and animal. The elements of which we are composed—carbon, calcium, iron—are the same elements of which the rest of the universe is made... We are not dominant over nature, as we once believed; we are its stewards and trustees. A religion of the future will affirm humankind's responsibility to preserve and sustain the natural world. The future of life on this planet and indeed of the planet itself depends on it." --UUA, William R. Murry, "[Reason and Reverence](#)," in *UUWorld Magazine*, Winter 2006.

Understanding that we are related to animals can help us live more authentically as humans

- **Many religious traditions insist that any affirmation of human-animal kinship would give humanity moral permission to wallow in our basest, most violent instincts. Unitarian Universalism, however, views this fear as unfounded. Embracing our kinship with animals, says the UUA, can help us see that our most noble traits are “deeply rooted...in our nature.” For instance, although some species of great apes (our closest animal cousins) exhibit violent tendencies, others display “kindness and sympathy and altruism.” Both traits run deep within us and it is “our job...to choose wisely which impulses to draw on.” In addition, wild animals can help us recognize what it means to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature. This recognition, in turn, can help us become better stewards of our planetary home. Embracing human-animal kinship, in other words, can help us be more authentically, and compassionately, human.**
- “Unitarian Universalists rally around a religious vision of people connecting with the sacred in life, of people being transformed by this connection and called into acts of compassion and hope, expanding our circle of concern beyond self-interest, so that we can be satisfied with nothing less than peace and justice for all...
“Yet this religious vision, and its corresponding commitment to healthy relationships, suggests a question: how deeply rooted is it in our nature?...
”Our human heritage, exemplified in our closest animal relatives, is mixed. Chimpanzees may be tribal and xenophobic, but bonobos regularly establish peaceful relations with foreigners. Our inner ape is not just one narrow thing... What’s deep down in human nature is broad: as much love and compassion as it is murder. And our job is to choose wisely which impulses to draw on.
“Kindness and sympathy and altruism are not veneer-thin but deep...they are a gift we share with our great ape brothers and sisters. This means we don’t have to be afraid of ourselves. It means we can replace the feeling of dread with a feeling of wonder. It means that we belong to creation. Unitarian Universalism is real. Our commitment to healthy relationships of trust and compassion is realistic. The animals bring us back to our senses. Koko [a gorilla who has been taught sign language], who signs to herself “fine animal gorilla,” teaches us to say, and gives us courage to say, “fine animal human.”
--from UUA, Anthony David, “[Our Inner Ape](#),” in *UUWorld Magazine*, Spring 2009.
- “There is wisdom in wildness. I don’t mean misbehavior, but real wildness, elemental wildness, animal wildness. There is wisdom in the wildness of the wolf, whose rhythms are completely attuned to the truth of the earth, who leaves silent paw prints in a world we can only taste, but never truly touch. There is wisdom in the wildness of the moose, in whose powerful legs can be found surprising grace. There is wisdom in the songbirds, whose lives

border our own, yet whose music will never be tamed....

“We are not wild, whatever pretensions we may have. Human language and society will always be imprinted upon us; we cannot escape them. We can, though, learn from the wildness of others. We can learn balance—in the wild, nature out of balance is nature dying. We can learn stewardship—like the wolf who culls the herd, or the raven who tends her nest. We can learn to listen to our senses—smell, taste, sound, touch, sight, and the indefinable instinct that we have almost, but never quite, forgotten.

“There is wisdom in wildness, and though we are not wild, there will always remain wildness within us. We touch it when we are at peace with nature, when our senses are heightened, when we become one with our surroundings, whatever they may be. We taste it when we are in love. And when we have given ourselves to the long and difficult work of tuning our minds, our homes, and our communities to the needs of the greater Earth, then we will have begun to live the wisdom of the wild.”

--from UUA, Dan Schatz, “[The Wisdom of the Wild](#),” in *UUWorld Magazine*, Spring 2011, reprinted from *The Song and the Sigh* (Thirty-six String Music, 2010).

Animals are "emotional beings" with "evolved capacities for...pleasure and suffering"

- **If humans and animals are kin, then animals, like humans, must be “subjects...with experiences all their own.” This view of animals is confirmed by science, says the UUA, which reveals that animals have “evolved capacities for satisfaction and frustration, pleasure and suffering.”**
 - "Zoologists, biologists, and cognitive ethologists all now agree that animals are emotional beings, and that like us, they evolved capacities for satisfaction and frustration, pleasure and suffering as biological necessities. Though animals are often considered part of 'the environment,' the complexity of their experiences suggest that they are much more than animated gardenias or slabs of granite. Animals are not so much a part of environment as they are subjects moving through the environment, with experiences all their own. As anyone who has gotten to know a dog, cat, bird, pig, or cow can tell you, animals are experiencing, sentient creatures with wants, needs, and frustrations."
--from UUA, *Congregational Study/Action Issue: [Ethical Eating: Food & Environmental Justice 2008-2012](#)*, pg 47.

Our religious insights should be expressed in our food, fashion, entertainment, and research choices

- **Our religious insight into the interdependence and kinship of all creatures is often forgotten when we leave the church and enter the mundane world of daily activities, comments the UUA. Although many people treat pets compassionately, we fail to recognize that the “freezer pack” of meat was also an animal with needs and emotions. This failure is partly the result of societal structures, which hide the abuses that take place in "factory farming, animal testing, sport shooting, fur trade, animal fights, and rodeos." In order to be true to UU Principles, members must open their eyes to the hidden suffering around them and recognize that seemingly "personal" choices--such as shopping and eating habits--profoundly impact animals and other forms of life on Earth.**
 - "The big picture on animal issues today is fraught with contradictions. On one hand, we see manifestations of love and appreciation for animals. Two-thirds of American households

have pets, and these households buy products and services totaling \$44 billion. Some 71 million Americans 'appreciate' wildlife, in the form of activities like whale watching or seeking information on wild animals. There are statutes prohibiting cruelty to animals in every state. Yet there is also routine exploitation of animals in the United States... Abuses can be found in factory farming, animal testing, sport shooting, fur trade, animal fights, and rodeos."

--from UUA, "[Principle in Mind, Fork in Hand: Ethical Eating](#)"

- "The simple act of eating expresses one of our most basic and profound relationships with Earth and life. For some of us, our main connection to non-human animals is through our forks and knives. Often, we know very little about them. The freezer pack wrapped in cellophane bears little resemblance to a fellow creature who sees and breathes and sighs. Their bodies become our bodies, yet their lives remain hidden from view.

"At the same time that supply chains distance us further and further from the sources of our food, agricultural methods have become increasingly intensive for the animals entangled in them. Once raised on farms by people who cared for their welfare, animals now are treated as commodities managed in facilities the industry calls 'Confined Animal Feeding Operations' (CAFOs), or 'factory farms.' The goals of efficiency and profit dictate the textures of their lives and deaths, yet all the while, from birth to slaughter, these beings suffer egregiously...

"At the heart of the impulse we call religious is the desire to lessen suffering and to extend justice and compassion. Increasingly, religious faiths and denominations are considering what this means in relation to non-human animals... Unitarian Universalists...are striving to articulate and practice interspecies ethics...[in order to] better honor the interdependent web of life of which we are all a part."

--from UUA, [Ethical Eating](#): *Food & Environmental Justice 2008-2012, Resource Guide*, Revised, pg 36.

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For more resources from HSUS Faith Outreach, including *Animal Protection Ministries: A Guide for Churches*, visit www.humanesociety.org/faith

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