

Judaism and Christianity: Two Historic Co-equal pillars of Unitarian Universalism

As a child, my parents impressed UU's second, third, and sixth principal on me: I was expected to eventually make the world a better place by helping others. Both of my parents were heavily in So when I researched Judaism for this sermon and read about the covenantal charge of Judaism, I recognized parallels to UU.

Both Unitarian Universalism and Judaism value secular and religious education, equality, religious freedom, and social justice. Most middle- and upper-class Jews in America expect their kids to do well in regular school, Hebrew school, and "Sunday School," where they study Jewish biblical and modern history. More religious Jews send their kids to a "yeshiva" [*pronounced "yuh-shee'-vuh"*] that combines all three areas of learning. Jewish teenagers all swap stories of hearing clichés like "You need this course for college," "This will look good on your college application," and "How do you expect to get into a good college with this grade?" from their parents. Jewish Community Centers in major metro areas frequently have adult education programs and scripture study groups, so that Jews can deepen their understanding of the religion throughout life.

Historically, Jews have been persecuted for their religion which tends to make many of them more tolerant of other monotheistic religions and to believe firmly in a need for the separation of church and state. As for atheists and agnostics, as many UU's may be, a Jew can be agnostic or even atheistic and still culturally be a Jew.

The Jewish community got in early on the civil rights movement of the 1960's. Jewish organizations, both civic and religious, participated in large numbers in organizing, marching, and lobbying Congress and Lyndon Johnson to pass both the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act. Jewish youth groups cultivate a social justice ethic in each generation through the [Jewish Service Corps](#). Several branches of Judaism often cooperate with Unitarian Universalist congregations in social justice work. Civil rights marches are a good example of this cooperation. Many UU and Jewish Leaders and members marched side by side in protest.

All these values stem from the belief that it is primarily through action that people become and stay good Jews. [*needs elaboration – talk to my Mom.*] There's a strong belief in Judaism that as part of Jews' covenant with God, they must participate in tikkun olam [*pronounced "tee-koon' oh-lahm'*], meaning "repair of the world." In fact, there's a [Jewish magazine](#) named "Tikkun" that focuses on American and Israeli culture, politics, religion, and history, with a strong emphasis on participation in the public arena. When we say to our children that "Service is our prayer," a Jewish person would agree — right, Ari? (*I'll say back, "Preach it, sister!"*)

———In his book *Friday, the Rabbi Slept Late*, Harry Kammelman wrote “Our people have only the one chance. Our good deeds must be done on this earth in this life. And since there is no one to share the burden with them or to intercede for them (as this is not the job of the Rabbi) they must do it on their own.”

This shared commitment to a just world has led a fair number of Jews to become members of UU. Some identify as both Jewish and Unitarian Universalist, while others may view themselves as simply Unitarian Universalist. The connection goes the other way, too: our hymnal contains 22 readings and 11 hymns from the Jewish tradition. Some UU congregations incorporate adapted rituals from the Jewish New Year, The Day of Atonement, and the Passover Seder into their calendar of events. Our own Unitarian Universalists for Jewish Awareness is committed to addressing "the Jewish dimension of Unitarian Universalism's multicultural challenge."

UU also shares the idea of a prophetic tradition with Judaism. The biblical Jewish prophets practiced prophecy in the oldest sense of the word: calling the nation of Israel to account, to live up to the religious and ethical values of its scriptures, whenever the prophets saw Jewish society straying from them. Most Old Testament names that survive today in this Westernized countries are prophets: Jonah, Deborah, Miriam, David, and Daniel — 55 in all. While we don't always call our religious sources prophets, and we don't always call our source of truth God, we have always honored the public UU voices calling for societies to be more just to more people, to give more people a say in how societies operate, and to preserve the world for future generations.

As in the civil rights era, many UU ministers and congregants have marched, are currently marching, and will continue to march against such injustices as religious intolerance and cruel immigration reform.

The Christian Roots of Unitarian Universalism can be simply explained with the following thoughts:

✿Unitarian vs. Trinitarian. Unitarian scholars found no basis for the doctrine of the trinity in the bible. In fact, research shows that this doctrine was not universally held by early Christians.

★Universalist salvation vs. salvation of a chosen few

✕Jesus is considered one of many important prophets who had many truths to share which are still relevant today. He is simply *the* definitive example of how God intends for everyone to achieve oneness with the divine.

Early Universalists were strongly committed to the authority of the Bible, but were exhorted to use their God given reason when reading, understanding and interpreting it. It was important to these early Universalists that people be given “not hell but hope and courage,” and

they did not wish to push people deeper into theological despair, but preached the kindness and everlasting love of God.

Joseph Priestly and his contemporary, Lindsey, took the radical position on the nature of Jesus as mortal, pure and simple. Jesus was human, but sent by God to change and redeem the world.

It would seem that Jefferson agreed with this, which may have led him to construct the so-called Jefferson Bible, in which he cut out all passages from that book that could not be attributed directly to Jesus. Ben Franklin, John Adams and Jefferson all attended the Unitarian church in London before the Revolution.

Many liberals in the Boston area during the 1700's wanted tolerant, inclusive churches which promoted a practical piety leading to moral and civic virtue. They were not interested in forcing others to believe as they did. In fact, the term *Unitarian* often referred to any liberal who had no particular use for speculative doctrine like the trinity, rather than to a particular denomination. They wanted above all for individuals to feel that God desired their souls to grow toward Him by expanding in compassion and wisdom.

William Ellory Channing, Unitarian Universalist luminary, preached the capacity of the soul to grow and expand and that the true Christian church is inclusive. No one can be excommunicated except by the death of goodness in one's own breast.

These liberal thinkers shifted the emphasis in their churches from the fallen character of humanity to the idea that all beings are made in the image of God. This emphasis led to pushes toward social reform in every institution because every individual needed to be given the opportunity to unfold the full and God-given potential within their very being.

When we look at the Seven Principles of our Unitarian Universalist faith we can clearly see the historical beginnings running through them:

We the Member Congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, Covenant to Affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person

Justice, equality and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of Conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace liberty and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

I hope it is a bit more clear to you how we have drawn from the goodness of both Judaism and Christianity and have made it our own. Blessed Be.