

Our Beliefs and How We Came to Them - BBUUC Journey Circle

February 2025

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but
connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: What is most on your mind today?

Today's Definition: Beliefs: A person's beliefs are their ideas about what is true. Beliefs can influence their actions, decisions, and attitudes. Beliefs can be based on what a person is or was taught as well as a person's experiences, observations, reflections, or faith.

For today's conversation, let's focus on this simplified overview of beliefs:

- **Core beliefs:** Fundamental beliefs about the world, others, and oneself.
- **Religious beliefs:** Beliefs about existence of deity/deities or other spiritual forces.
- **Political beliefs:** Beliefs about how power should be distributed in society, but please talk about "big picture" themes.
- **Social beliefs:** Beliefs about how people should interact with each other and society.

Opening Reading

"Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation." – D. Elton Trueblood

"All money is a matter of belief." - Adam Smith

"One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying." - Joan of Arc

"The word 'belief' is a difficult thing for me. I don't believe. I must have a reason for a certain hypothesis. Either I know a thing, and then I know it - I don't need to believe it." - Carl Jung

"We go wrong when we don't admit the unknowable complexity of reality, but we go dangerously wrong when we claim that one pale story—or an anthology of them—is truth." - Dean Koontz

"Tell people there's an invisible man in the sky who created the universe, and the vast majority will believe you. Tell them the paint is wet, and they have to touch it to be sure." ~George Carlin

Topic Exploration

Goddesses, Demons, Djinn, Angels, Aliens, Heaven, Atheism, Reincarnation, Predestination, Nirvana, Evolution, Marxism, Free Markets, Climate Change, Psychics, QAnon, Racial Purity, Individualism, Justice, Nationalism, Democracy, Monarchy, Equality, the Web of Life and Love - each is an essential truth to billions - and simultaneously a false delusion to an equally large population.

While we have confidence in our own beliefs, some examined, others taken on faith, it's often too easy to see others' beliefs as ridiculous, irrational or even evil. These differences can lead to a spat among friends or to a war killing millions.

As our beliefs guide our decisions and thus determine our actions, the totality of our beliefs direct our lived experience. Belief systems can be deeply woven into the fabric of our lives. However, it has been said all beliefs are wrong, only that some are less so.

The universe vastly exceeds our ability to comprehend. The best we can do is inhabit a model our minds have constructed. Each of us lives in our own unique ever-changing world shaped from experiences, memories and thoughts. And yet for every one of our beliefs there is someone holding an opposite view. How do we know what to trust, and what biases prejudice our conclusions?

Modernity has enveloped us all in its constant change; overwhelmingly rapid, disorienting and anxiety provoking. To navigate a future increasingly unknowable and uncertain, many seek to be grounded in the timeless truths and absolutes that beliefs may hold. Others surrender to a doctrine where truths and morality cannot be known, but must constantly be explored. Between certainty and nihilism (the rejection of all belief systems), most of us seek a nuanced path with elements of trust as well as skepticism.

From our very first moments and throughout our lives, our beliefs are constructed from a mix of our own experience, perception, memory and reason. Perceived authorities, whether parent, peer, professor, president or pope seed many of these beliefs. But in the end, our beliefs are the one aspect of our identity that we have total control over.

Questions / Sharing

1. Which of your major beliefs were self-determined and which were received from others?
Could you share an example of how you came to a particular belief?
2. How do you think your cultural background influences your beliefs?
3. What sort of things, if any, do you take “on faith”?
4. Has there been a personal experience, event or observance that has led you to reexamine or reject key beliefs?
5. Can you relay a time when your beliefs are challenged by others?
6. “The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it.”
~J. M. Barrie, “Peter Pan”. This is an all-or-nothing view about beliefs. In your experience, does questioning your beliefs make them stronger or does it weaken them?

Closing Reading

“Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.” — Mahatma **Gandhi**

Check-out and reflections on today’s session: Please express any closing thoughts about today’s topic or the process of today’s session.

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
The warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.