

DECEMBER MONTHLY THEME:
SCIENCE—FINDING TRUTH, TELLING STORIES

Too often the relationship between science and religion has been viewed as one of conflict and tension. On the one hand, science is seen as associated with facts, reason, and truth. On the other hand, religion is often perceived to be based on mystery, faith, and story. And yet, both religion and science attempt to wrestle with the big questions of life and marvel with wonder at the mysteries of the universe. Rather than see conflict with scientific methods, our religious tradition encourages ongoing questions, testing of experience, and syntheses of understanding. What questions might we bring to ancient religious stories in this holiday season? What meaning and truths might we find in stories that are often not scientifically provable or true? As we explore the theme of science in this month of “holiday magic,” how might we more deeply understand our relationships with both science and religion?

Which question is calling to you? Where is it leading you?

1. What are your early memories of learning about science (astronomy, biology, chemistry, earth science, physics...)? What are your early memories of learning about religion and faith?
2. Do you use science and religion for different questions or aspects or guidance in your life? Do they overlap in any areas?
3. How does your understanding of science *inform* or *interfere* with your religious/spiritual beliefs?
4. Do science and spirituality have parallel or opposing paths?
5. Can scientific discovery be a religious experience?
6. Do you believe critical thinking can or should be used in the same way for questions related to science and questions related to religion?
7. What is the relationship, for you, between science and faith? Are they mutually exclusive?

Wise Words:

The most beautiful experience we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and true science. *Albert Einstein*

The feeling of awed wonder that science can give us is one of the highest experiences of which the human psyche is capable. *Richard Dawkins*

The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and realities of the universe about us, the less taste we shall have for destruction. *Rachel Carson, Unitarian, biologist*

This job is a great scientific adventure. But it's also a great human adventure. Mankind has made giant steps forward. However, what we know is really very, very little compared to what we still have to know. *Fabiola Gianotti, Higgs Boson physicist*

Because a fact seems strange to you, you conclude that it is not one. ... All science, however, commences by being strange. Science is successive. It goes from one wonder to another. It mounts by a ladder. The science of to-day would seem extravagant to the science of a former time. Ptolemy would believe Newton mad.

Victor Hugo

Scientific practice is above all a story-telling practice. ... Biology is inherently historical, and its form of discourse is inherently narrative.

Donna Haraway

The universe is made of stories—not atoms.

Muriel Ruykeyser, poet

Science, for me, gives a partial explanation for life. In so far as it goes, it is based on fact, experience and experiment.

Rosalind Franklin, a key figure behind unlocking human DNA

Today science marches on not so much via proofs as through the persuasive coherency of the picture it presents. What passes for truth in science is a comprehensive pattern of interconnected answers to questions posed to nature—explanations of how things work...though not necessarily why they work...

Owen Gingerich, astronomer

Science investigates; religion interprets. Science gives man knowledge, which is power; religion gives man wisdom, which is control. Science deals mainly with facts; religion deals mainly with values. The two are not rivals.

Martin Luther King, Jr

In my view, science and Buddhism share a search for the truth and for understanding reality. By learning from science about aspects of reality where its understanding may be more advanced, I believe that Buddhism enriches its own worldview.

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama

There may be babblers, wholly ignorant of mathematics, who dare to condemn my hypothesis, upon the authority of some part of the Bible twisted to suit their purpose. I value them not, and scorn their unfounded judgment.

Nicolaus Copernicus

I like the scientific spirit—the holding off, the being sure but not too sure, the willingness to surrender ideas when the evidence is against them: this is ultimately fine—it always keeps the way beyond open—always gives life, thought, affection, the whole man, a chance to try over again after a mistake—after a wrong guess.

Walt Whitman

Science, my lad, is made up of mistakes, but they are mistakes which it is useful to make, because they lead little by little to the truth.

Jules Verne, A Journey to the Center of the Earth

Science makes people reach selflessly for truth and objectivity; it teaches people to accept reality, with wonder and admiration, not to mention the deep awe and joy that the natural order of things brings to the true scientist.

Lise Meitner, physicist

Ancient African empires - Mali, Songhai, Egypt - had scientists, astronomers. The fact is that space and its resources belong to all of us, not to any one group.

Mae C. Jemison

All of my life, I have been fascinated by the big questions that face us, and have tried to find scientific answers to them. If, like me, you have looked at the stars, and tried to make sense of what you see, you too have started to wonder what makes the universe exist.

Stephen Hawking

Resources:

- “News of the Infinite”, Gary Kowalski
- “Humanist Manifesto, I” One of the UU Sources is “Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.”
- UU Woman in LEGO Set
- “Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin: Astronomer and pioneer”

Books

- *God Revised: How Religion Must Evolve in a Scientific Age*, Galen Guengerich
- *A God That Could Be Real: Spirituality, Science, and The Future of Our Planet*, Nancy Ellen Abrams
- *Science and the Search for God*, Gary Kowalski
- *Superior: The Return of Race Science*, Angela Saini

Books for Kids

- *Never Stop Wondering* Emily Morgan
- *Ada Twist Scientist* Andrea Beaty
- *The Science of Christmas*