WORKSHOP 7: INTRODUCTION TO EASTERN RELIGIONS

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

All things are within me, and on self-examination, I find no greater joy than to be true to myself. We should do our best to treat others as we wish to be treated. Nothing is more appropriate than to seek after goodness. — Mencius, Confucian philosopher (372-289 BCE)

This workshop introduces a cluster of faiths that coalesced between 600 and 500 BCE in the Middle East (Iran), South Asia (India), and Central Asia (China). While differing in their details, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism are linked by some foundational principles as well as by their emergence within a few thousand miles and a hundred years of one another. Each represents a response to people's urgent need for meaning, purpose, and spiritual sustenance. All are still followed in some form today.

The workshop emphasizes Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Confucianism, as the program provides other workshops on Taoism (Workshop 8) and Buddhism (Workshops 9 and 10). By presenting this cluster of faiths together in overview, the workshop invites youth to recognize both similarities and differences among Eastern religions. Showing similarities will likely prove easy, as the workshop highlights commonalities that link these faiths. To avoid the impression that the Eastern religions are "all alike," highlight differences among them, too. As with other religions explored in the program, participants will likely discover ideas and practices that resonate with their own.

This workshop provides a large amount of overview information. The group may react with inattentive or physically restless behavior. Be ready to add short energy breaks when needed.

GOALS

This workshop will:

- Deepen understanding of how societies develop different religions to meet the same basic needs, through exploring five religions that emerged within a short period of time in the Eastern hemisphere
- Introduce fundamental aspects of Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism and some of the precepts they share
- Demonstrate ways Unitarian Universalists can draw wisdom from Eastern faiths by exploring the Buddhist concept of ahimsa, or nonviolence; Confucian aphorisms; fire's symbolism in Zoroastrianism; and an allegorical story about interconnectedness, "Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net," from Hindu and Buddhist traditions
- Enhance appreciation for the global diversity of faiths and world views.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Participants will:
- Understand how different societies embrace different religions to meet the same basic needs, by exploring five Eastern religions born between 500-600 BCE
- Become familiar with fundamental aspects of Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Confucianism, including some common qualities of these faiths
- Explore the Buddhist and Jain concept of ahimsa, nonviolence, as an Eastern faith wisdom embraced by many Unitarian Universalists
- Discover universal wisdom in sayings of Confucius, and learn how Confucianism has been trivialized in Western cultures
- Connect Eastern faith perspectives with our seventh Unitarian Universalist Principle, respect for the interconnectedness of living beings, through the allegorical story from Hindu and Buddhist traditions, "Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net."

WORKSHOP-AT-A-GLANCE

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SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

The word "religion" derives from the Latin religare, meaning to bind or tie fast—to connect. All religions emerge to serve this function. Religions last when they continue to connect their adherents, and the five religions introduced in this workshop have each lasted more than 2,500 years. Think of how many journeys these faiths have supported, how many lives enriched, how many with courage emboldened, how many hearts replenished.

These Eastern faiths share some fundamental principles which are less apparent in Western faiths, for example, the high value placed on duty, the sense of connection with ancestors, and behavior guidelines based on a goal of societal harmony. Remarkably, all five took hold in the Eastern hemisphere within 100 years of one another.

Once you have read the workshop, try a time-travel reflection. You may want to light a candle and sit quietly for 15 minutes or so. Consider how your Unitarian Universalist faith fulfills the functions of a religion. How does it connect you with yourself, your family and community, perhaps something greater? Now, mentally transport yourself to what is now Iran, India, or China, in the year 600 BCE. Try to imagine what your life would be like. Your basic, human
needs would be the same needs you have now. But, your life would be quite different. How would you meet your basic physical needs? How do you think the religion emerging around you in 600 BCE might meet your spiritual needs? Take time to acknowledge the appeal and the enduring vitality of these Eastern religions and the many millions of connections they have brought to humanity.

WORKSHOP PLAN

OPENING (15 MINUTES)

Materials for Activity
- Chalice, candle, and lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Globe or world map
- Leader Resource 2, Eastern Religions Background (included in this document)
- Optional: History game pieces (Leader Resource 1)

Preparation for Activity
- Read Leader Resource 2, Eastern Religions Background, so you will be comfortable presenting it.
- Draw a 100-year time line on newsprint. Mark "600 BCE" on the left end and "500 BCE" on the right. Add a single mark at the halfway point and label "550 BCE." Post the time line.
- Post another, blank sheet of newsprint.

Description of Activity
Answer any questions you were unable to answer at the last workshop meeting.

Then light the chalice with these words:

We light this chalice in celebration of Unitarian Universalism and the sustaining faiths of all people of the world. May the flame represent the fire of our commitment to understand all faithful people and build bridges that connect us as one human family.

Tell the group they will look at several Eastern religions that all began around the same time. Ask participants what Eastern faiths they are familiar with. If the group has done Workshop 4, Hinduism might also be named. Comment that while the youth might not be familiar with all the religions born in the Eastern hemisphere during this explosive time in human history, all five of these faiths have been influential in world history and still are practiced today.

On the 100-year time line, write:
- Zoroastrianism — around 600 BCE
- Jainism — around 556 BCE
- Taoism — around 550 BCE
- Buddhism — around 531 BCE
- Confucianism — around 500 BCE

Remind youth that "BCE" stands for Before Common Era, that is, before the year zero; the bigger numbers indicate longer ago, like negative numbers on a number line.

Explain, in your own words:

Iran, India, and China in the several hundred years leading up to 600 BCE were places of danger, turmoil, and radical social change. The tensions in which people lived had multiple effects: artistic expression and scientific invention abounded, and because life was so tenuous in their physical world, people looked beyond themselves for answers. From this fertile spiritual soil of high energy and creativity, rapid change, and great uncertainty emerged five major religions, all of which survive, including one of the five largest faiths on earth, Buddhism. These religions, born in dynamic answer to human need, have been sustaining people ever since.

There are remarkable similarities among these faiths and notable differences. All emerged on the contiguous land mass of Asia. (Show countries on map as they are named.) Zoroastrianism arose in Iran, Jainism and Buddhism emerged in India, and Taoism and Confucianism in China. We can speculate why there might be such similarity among faiths born in the same part of the world around the same time.

Read aloud or share in your own words the information in Leader Resource 2. List important terms on newsprint.

As you go along, or afterward, invite participants to share knowledge they already hold about Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Confucianism. Tell the group they will study Taoism and Buddhism in greater depth in later workshops.

**ACTIVITY 1: STORY — INDRA'S MAGNIFICENT JEWELED NET (10 MINUTES)**

**Materials for Activity**
- A copy of the story "Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net" (included in this document)
- A wide, flat pan
- A pitcher, filled with enough water to cover the bottom of the pan, one inch deep

**Preparation for Activity**
- Read the story so you will be comfortable presenting it.
- Set the pan and pitcher on a work table where the group can gather immediately after you tell the story.
Description of Activity
Tell participants one theme that links the Eastern faiths is the interrelated nature of living things. The story, "Indra's Magnificent Jeweled Net," explores this theme.

Tell or read aloud the story.

STORY: INDRA'S MAGNIFICENT JEWELED NET
A traditional Buddhist and Hindu story.

Far, far away, in the abode of the great god Indra, king of heaven, hangs a wondrous vast net, much like a spider's web in intricacy and loveliness. It stretches out indefinitely in all directions. At each node, or crossing point, of the net hangs a single glittering jewel. Since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. The sparkling jewels hang there, suspended in and supported by the net, glittering like stars, dazzling to behold.

Close your eyes, now, and imagine what this magnificent jeweled net looks like, spread across the vast expanse of space. Now, keep your eyes closed and move in close to one jewel in the net. Look closely, and you will see that the polished surface of the gem reflects all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number, just as two mirrors placed opposite each other reflect an image ad infinitum. Each jewel reflected in this gem you are gazing into also reflects all the other jewels, so that the process of reflection is itself infinite.

Now open your eyes, and know that you are a sparkling jewel in Indra's Net, as is every person around you. Every jewel is connected with all the other jewels in the net; every person is intimately connected with all the other persons in the universe. Each has an independent place within the net and we all reflect and influence each other. A change in one jewel—or person—produces a change, however slight, in every other. Realize, too, that the infinite reflections speak to the illusory nature of appearances. Appearances are not, in fact, reality, but only a reflection; the true nature of a thing is not to be captured in its appearance. However powerful that appearance might be, it is yet only a reflection of what is real.

In addition, whatever you do to one jewel affects the entire net, as well as yourself. You cannot damage one strand of a spider web without injuring the entire web, and you cannot damage one strand of the web that is the universe without injuring all others in it, whether that injury is known or unknown to them. This can work for good or ill because, of course, just as destructive acts affect the entire net, so do loving, constructive, compassionate acts affect the entire net. A single helpful act—even a simple act of kindness—will send positive ripples across the infinite net, touching every jewel, every person in existence.

Ask participants for their initial reactions. What did they think of the story? What did it mean to them? Did it resonate with their Unitarian Universalist beliefs?

Continue discussion with questions such as the following:

- Indra's net can be interpreted as an image about the emptiness or the illusion of reality. However, in this telling of the story, we hear mostly about the interconnectedness symbolized in the net. Do youth agree with the central point of the story, that all living things are indivisibly connected?
• Is this the same point as the Unitarian Universalist seventh Principle: "We affirm and promote ... respect for the interconnected web of all existence of which we are a part?" Can you agree with the seventh Principle and not agree with the full implications of the story?

• Do youth agree that a person cannot take any action, good or bad, without affecting every other person? What are the implications of that idea?

• The story states, "However powerful ... appearance might be, it is yet only a reflection of what is real." Do the youth agree with this statement?

A web or net is a common metaphor for interconnectedness. Share with participants that water can also illustrate interconnectedness. Explain that it is impossible to disturb one point on the surface of a body of water without affecting all the rest of the water.

Invite the youth to gather around the pan and the pitcher. Pour water into the pan to a depth of at least one inch. Allow the water to settle until the surface is calm. Invite everyone to watch closely and ask one youth to just barely touch the surface of the water. Observe that even a slight touch affects all the water in the pan!

Ask another youth to more strongly flick the surface of the water. Again, observe. Ask the group for their thoughts. What was the difference? The effect might have been bigger with the stronger disturbance, but was it more comprehensive? Did the tiny touch reach just as far as the bigger one? Process with these questions:

• Is the water an apt analogy for people? Are human connections as fluid as water? Does this hold true in our close communities? Does it hold true for humanity across the globe? Across history?

• What about other life, such as plants, wild life, domesticated animals, and bugs?

• If beings are interconnected, would we, as UUs, say there is a moral imperative to not take harmful actions, not only because of their effect on ourselves, but because they affect others? What about the opposite—if all life is interconnected, is there a moral imperative to do good.

Including All Participants

Situate the pitcher and pan so participants with impaired mobility can observe the demonstration after the story without moving position.

ACTIVITY 2: SAYINGS OF CONFUCIUS (10 MINUTES)

Materials for Activity

• Handout 1, Aphorisms of Confucius (included in this document)
• Pencils/pens
• Optional: Bag of fortune cookies
Preparation for Activity

- Copy the handout.
- Optional: Purchase fortune cookies that contain sayings allegedly by Confucius (not all do). If ordering, do so at least two weeks ahead. Find them at a Chinese restaurant supply outlet, or online at the Fornia Fortune Cookies (at www.fornafortunecookies.com/) or the K and B Bakery (at www.kbbakery.com/home) website. If you wish, customize the message.

Description of Activity

Participants explore Confucianism through 20 sayings attributed to Confucius. They consider the impact of Westerners encountering Confucian wisdom initially through fortune cookies or jokes. They discuss how the brevity of a message or the context of its delivery might enhance, or detract from, its wisdom. They seek ways to distinguish a religion from a philosophy.

Ask if participants have heard of Confucius. Ask if they have heard someone introduce a saying with the phrase, "Confucius say..." If they have, what was the intent of words follow? Serious, funny, or a combination of both?

Youth may demonstrate or ask about quoting Confucius ungrammatically and with a "Chinese accent." Use the teachable moment; analyze with questions such as:

- Why do you think people find this funny? Do you think it is funny?
- Who would not think this is funny? What about someone who is Chinese? Someone who practices Confucianism? Someone for whom English is a second language? Someone of a different racial or ethnic group than the person saying it?

Tell the group many Westerners first encounter the name and ideas of Confucius through Chinese restaurant fortune cookies, movies, or TV shows. For this reason, the name of Confucius has been a springboard for jokes among non-Chinese. Give this example:

- Confucius say... when called an idiot, sometimes is better to be quiet, than open mouth and remove all doubt.

Now, ask the group:

- Is there wisdom? What is the wisdom?
- Is there humor in this statement? Why? (Is it the incorrect English phrasing? The content of the statement? Or maybe the way poor English and valuable wisdom are combined?)
- What might a statement like this, tucked inside a fortune cookie, which imitates Confucius' style make people think about Confucianism? If you are someone who, before today, had only heard of Confucius because of fortune cookies, you can speak from your own experience.
- What does it say about our Western culture that Confucius is presented as a humorous character?

If you have time, use the same questions to examine another fortune cookie example:

- Confucius say... war not determine who is right; war determine who is left.
Now say, in your own words:

_These statements were not written by Confucius, a revered Chinese philosopher who lived over 2,000 years ago. However, Confucius did teach in short sayings like these—aphorisms. An aphorism is a brief statement that expresses an important idea in a memorable way. Confucius never considered his teachings religious. He offered practical advice to help people behave virtuously and conduct harmonious relationships with their parents, spouse, family members, friends, and also their ruler and/or subjects, in the hierarchy of his time and place. People's spiritual beliefs were of no concern to Confucius. That is why many consider Confucianism a philosophy and not a religion._

_While there is no formal Confucian religion for people to join today, Confucian ideas are woven into other Eastern faiths that consider a sense of duty, right behavior, and respect for elders and ancestors very important. As Unitarian Universalism, we may also draw from Confucian wisdom._

Distribute the handout and invite youth to read the sampling of Confucian sayings (aphorisms). You may wish to read the sayings aloud, or invite one or more volunteers to read them.

Ask the group for their initial reactions: Which sayings are meaningful to them? Which speak to important principles?

Distribute pencils. Give these directions:

1. Circle aphorisms you agree with.
2. Draw a line under aphorisms that remind you of a teaching from another religion we have studied together or another religion or philosophy you know about.

Allow youth a few minutes to work. Then, lead the group to unpack the wisdom in the sayings. Start by inviting volunteers to share their responses from their handouts. To help the group find parallels between Confucian ideas and ideas of other faiths, suggest:

- 4 is similar to Jewish beliefs about atonement and repentance
- 7 is similar to the Golden Rule, found in many faiths
- 13 and 15 reflect our fourth Unitarian Universalist Principle, "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning"
- 20 reflects our seventh Principle, "respect for the interdependent web of all life."

If you have brought fortune cookies, distribute them as a snack. Invite participants to share the messages they find inside their cookies.

**Variation**

If you have time, before distributing the handout engage the group to distinguish between a philosophy and a religion. Use these questions:

- What is the difference between a philosophy and a religion?
- Must a religion offer instruction about the spirit? What are some examples?
- Is instruction in living a good life inherently religious? Why or why not?
Including All Participants
As with any activity that includes a snack, find out in advance about participants' food allergies and restrictions. If anyone might be allergic to an ingredient, skip the fortune cookies.

Be alert to how youth use humor as the activity moves into the Confucian sayings and, if you have them, fortune cookie messages. If necessary, remind youth gently that to seek laughs by delivering a saying in poor or accented English reflects a narrow view of the world's religions and indeed its wisdom, and violates our own first Principle, the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

ACTIVITY 3: FIRE, SYMBOL OF GOD (25 MINUTES)

Materials for Activity
- Your class chalice

Preparation for Activity
- The use of flames may be restricted in your meeting space. You may wish to move the group to another location, possibly outdoors, for the first part of this activity. If you cannot use fire, use an LED/battery operated chalice and adapt the activity as described below.
- Optional: Find out where in the congregation you can display the work of participants willing to share. An exhibit of varied images will show the youth's exploration to the congregational community.

Description of Activity
Youth learn the meaning of fire in Zoroastrianism and explore the meanings of the Unitarian Universalist flame.

Share the following:

Zoroastrianism is an intricate religion. It espouses a constant battle between good and evil and humans play an important role in this battle, marked by many festivals and rituals. Several rituals involve fire. Zoroastrians are sometimes misunderstood as worshiping fire. While not true, the misconception derives from their use of a sacred fire in prayer and worship. Fire as a symbol of God exists from the most ancient times: fire is mysteriously powerful, it devours, it purifies, it is light, warmth, and energy—just as God is frequently portrayed as light, warmth, and energy. Zoroastrians therefore utilize a sacred fire to focus their worship, but are not worshiping the flame itself.

Ask if any other religions feature fire, light, or candles prominently.

Move the chalice to the center of the space. Remark that almost all Unitarian Universalist congregations share the symbol of the flaming chalice, and like Zoroastrians we use it as a symbol of all we share, whatever each of us considers Most High or Divine.

Invite youth to observe the flame for a time and contemplate what it means to them.
If you cannot use a live flame, invite the youth to share experiences they have had staring into a fire or flame: What did it look like? Smell like? Were they close enough to feel the fire's heat? Did they have a meditative experience? Was it alone, or shared with others? What sorts of thoughts did they have while staring into the fire?

Invite volunteers to share about any symbolism fire or the chalice hold for them. Then, share, in your own words:

In Unitarian Universalism, flame has many meanings: the search for truth, Truth itself, the intellect, God, inspiration, commitment, mission, fellowship, spirit, and much more. The symbol of our faith, the flaming chalice, takes many forms as individuals seek to express what it means to them. There are colorful chalices, line drawings of chalices, chalice jewelry. There are chalices that look like people, rainbows, fountains, atoms, and more. Yet all the chalice symbols refer to the same, simple flame.

Ask:

- If you were to create a chalice that expressed your own highest vision of your faith, what would it look like?

Allow some time for sharing.

**ACTIVITY 3: LIFE OF A JAIN (15 MINUTES)**

**Materials for Activity**

- Leader Resource 3, [Jain Symbol](#) (included in this document)

**Preparation for Activity**

- Print Leader Resource 3.
- Optional: Read the article "The Concepts of Ahimsa or Nonviolence" (at www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/concepts/ahimsa.asp) by Jayaram V on the HinduWebsite (at www.hinduwebsite.com); it details how ancient and contemporary Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists have practiced ahimsa in daily life.

**Description of Activity**

Youth explore the concept of *ahimsa*—nonviolence, or, doing no harm to any living being—and consider the trade-off we make in industrialized societies: casual harm for human convenience.

Share with participants that Jains are fervently committed to ahimsa. As far as possible, they do no harm to anything that lives. Display the Jain symbol (Leader Resource 3). Explain, in your own words:

The Jain symbol is a hand with a wheel and the word "ahimsa" in the palm, reminding Jains to be aware of the effect they have on their world. Jains practice radical mindfulness of all living things: humans, of course, but also animals (all kinds, mammals to bugs), plants, even microorganisms—anything they know to be alive.
Ask youth to stand up. Indicate two ends of a continuum: no harm at one end, great harm at the other. Tell them you will read a list of human actions that could affect other life, and you would like them to position themselves along the continuum to show how much harm they think is done by each action.

Read each item aloud. Give youth time to move, and then ask if they think that action would be all right to do: If the action is doing harm, would they nonetheless consider the actions justifiable? Why or why not? Would they feel bad about it? Would the amount of harm be different if they did the action, as opposed to someone else? Why or why not?

**Actions**

Stepping on a bug by accident
Stepping on a bug on purpose
Hitting a dog with your car
Eating leftovers
Eating root vegetables, such as potatoes and carrots (destroying the plant)
Having an ill or aged pet put down by the veterinarian
Knocking down a hornets’ nest
Swatting a mosquito on your arm
Treating your pet for fleas
Cutting down a tree that is in the way of building a house
Paving a parking lot
Treating your house for termites
Insulting someone
Stealing something
Telling a lie
Wearing leather shoes
Pulling weeds from your yard
Treating a child for lice
Driving a car
Laughing at someone
Buying something wrapped in lots of packaging
Throwing away food
Buying more than you need or buying something you do not need
Eating more than your body needs
Downloading pirated music or software
Not helping someone when you can, even in small ways

Invite youth to return to their seats, and continue discussion:

- What constitutes harm?
- Do you think about not doing harm in your daily lives? When?
- How do you, or could you, choose when to do harm and when not to?
- Is everything that is alive worthy of consideration before harming it? Is everything that is alive capable of experiencing distress? Should that be a deciding factor?
- What would youth consider "reasonable" harm? Is there any harm that is okay?
- Is being grateful enough compensation to the earth, or to other life, for our actions that cause harm? Is being grateful even necessary or important?
- Can preventing greater harm justify doing harm? When is doing harm "worth it?"
- What about harm done in your behalf?
- Does dedication to a goal that is impossible seem simple-minded or foolish? If the goal is a worthy one, than is getting as close to it as possible better than not trying at all?
- How would your life be different if you applied the principle of ahimsa as Jains do? What would you have to change?

Including All Participants
If any participant is unable to easily move along a physical continuum, have the youth show their answers another way, such as by raising two hands for "great harm," one hand for "some harm," and no hands for "no harm."

ACTIVITY 4: FACT SHEET (5 MINUTES)

Materials for Activity
- Handout 2, Comparative Chart of Eastern Religions (included in this document)
- A poster of the Unitarian Universalist Principles
Preparation for Activity

- Copy the handout for all participants.
- Display a poster of the seven UU Principles in the meeting space.

**Description of Activity**

Youth receive a comparative chart to take home.

Inform youth, as you distribute the handout, that instead of the standard fact sheet on each religion, this handout is a chart comparing the Eastern religions explored today and in upcoming workshops. Review the handout, using these prompts:

- Can you identify aspects of these religions that engage with the basic human needs met by religion? [answers to big questions, a connection to something larger than ourselves, knowing right from wrong, providing meaning and a purpose to life, and creating a sense of belonging]
- What beliefs do UUs and these religions share?
- How does knowing about these Eastern religions influence your Unitarian Universalist faith?

If there are outstanding questions about the religions, assign volunteers to research and bring answers to the next workshop or divide these duties between facilitators.

**ACTIVITY 5: TIME LINE (3 MINUTES)**

**Materials for Activity**

- Religions Time Line (Workshop 1)
- Sticky notes and fine-point markers
- World map or globe

**Preparation for Activity**

- Display the time line where all participants will be able to see it.
- Create and set aside sticky notes saying "Confucianism, 500 BCE," "Jainism, 556 BCE," and "Zoroastrianism, 600 BCE."

**Description of Activity**

The time line is updated to add new religions.

Have the group add Confucianism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism to the time line and mark on the globe or map where each originated.

Ask participants if they remember or can guess where Confucianism, Jainism, and Zoroastrianism were born. Mark China, India, and Iran on the map or globe.

Invite them to remember or guess the founding dates of all three, and place the sticky notes on the time line.
If appropriate, remind the group they will study Taoism and Buddhism in more depth in future workshops.

**CLOSING (2 MINUTES)**

Invite participants to sit in a circle and join hands and say together:

> All our bridges meet in the middle, in a Unitarian Universalist circle of faith. We are connected with all that lives. We continue with all who seek. We belong with all who love. Go in peace until we meet again.

Extinguish the chalice together.

**LEADER REFLECTION AND PLANNING**

Review today's workshop with your co-leader. This workshop introduced an important historical time in the development of world religion, as well as five enduring faiths. How did the youth handle this large amount of material? Were they able to absorb most of it? Did they connect the concept of ahimsa to their own lives? Could they engage the familiar subject of interrelatedness through a story from another faith tradition? Did they seem to understand the deeper religious and philosophical concepts, particularly those they encountered for the first time today? Which kinds of activities worked well with your group?

Discuss how you will apply your answers to these questions in future workshops.
TAKING IT HOME

All things are within me, and on self-examination, I find no greater joy than to be true to myself. We should do our best to treat others as we wish to be treated. Nothing is more appropriate than to seek after goodness.
— Mencius, Confucian philosopher (372-289 BCE)

IN TODAY'S WORKSHOP... we discussed the almost simultaneous birth of five religions in Asia between 600 and 500 BCE. We examined fundamental concepts of Confucianism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Taoism and discovered some beliefs and practices they share.

REFLECTION QUESTION

Do we "take things with us?" Whether or not you believe in the doctrine of karma, do you believe there is spiritual baggage from our actions?

EXPLORE THE TOPICS WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- One fundamental agreement among four of the five world religions birthed in Asia between 600 and 500 BCE is gender equality, that women and men have equal capabilities. What do the religions of your family members and friends say about gender equality? Are all professions of faith—including the ministry—open to all genders?

- Fortune cookie inserts are sometimes silly or meaningless. However, simple statements can have deep meaning, even if they are funny. Here is an interesting idea for fun or as a fundraiser for any group. Schedule a time with family or friends to write sayings to go in fortune cookies. Write things that are simple or funny but have a meaningful message, too. For Valentine's Day, you might write sayings about love and relationships. Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Chinese New Year (February or March) are also good opportunities, as is Halloween. For a graduation, collect wisdom from and for the graduating class. Then make fortune cookies together; find a recipe online at Fortune Cookie Recipe 1 (at allrecipes.com/Recipe/Fortune-Cookies-I/Detail.aspx) or Fortune Cookie Recipe 2 (at chinesefood.about.com/od/diningout/r/fortunecookie.htm). Stuff the fortune cookies and serve them to friends or sell them for a fundraiser. Of course, this is best done without any humorous references to respected Chinese philosopher, Confucius.

- Do you include interesting quotes as part of your email signature or on your Facebook page? Add a saying attributed to Confucius and see how friends respond.

- The I Ching is an ancient book of revelation—at least 3,000 years old. Find someone experienced in this art associated with Confucianism and have them help you ask the I Ching a question...if you dare!

- Confucianism advises that we keep loving foundations in five relationships: parent/child, older sibling/younger sibling, between spouses, between friends, and ruler/subject. How are you doing in these relationships? If you feel that one or more is not as loving as you would like, how can you fix it? Notice that most of the relationships can be found in the home, which Confucius considered the cradle of a strong ethical being. The one that
noticeably is not in the home is ruler/subject. One modern way of expressing this here would be representative/voter. Do you communicate with your political representative? Are they held accountable for responding to you in a humane and loving way? You might also think of your relationships with teachers or coaches in this way.

- Covering three schools of thought in one workshop only allows for a basic introduction. Here are a few good places to find out more: Religious Tolerance (at www.religioustolerance.org); BeliefNet (at www.beliefnet.com); Jainsim.org (at www.jainism.org); Spiritual Sanctuary (at www.thespiritualsanctuary.org/Confucianism/Confucianism.html).

- Jains are vegetarians. So are many Buddhists. So are many UUs. A Jain website for young children has a song (sung to the tune of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm") to teach young people that you can be vegetarian and still enjoy an array of food. Listen to *I Am A Vegetarian* by Nimisha Asthagiri (at www.jaina.org/?LilIamVegetarian).
SUPPLIES ARE NOT PROVIDED FOR ALTERNATIVE ACTIVITIES. YOU ARE WELCOME TO INCLUDE THEM IN YOUR LESSON. IF YOU NEED ANY SPECIAL MATERIALS, PLEASE NOTIFY THE R.E. OFFICE AT LEAST ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE.

ALTERNATE ACTIVITY 1: WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND (30 MINUTES)

Materials for Activity

- Newton's Cradle desktop toy (see Leader Resource 4, Newton's Cradle, Illustration (included in this document) ) or a pendulum

Preparation for Activity

- Obtain a Newton's Cradle toy. Or, make a simple pendulum: Tie a stone (approximately 2 inches across is a good size) or a similar object to a string about 12 inches long, and tie the loose end of the string someplace where the stone can both hang at rest and be pushed into motion and swing freely.

Description of Activity

Participants explore the concept of karma, and the idea that all actions have consequences.

Ask youth what they have heard about karma. Is this a term that is casually used by family members or friends? As they have heard it used, does it have a specific meaning or more general implications? What does it mean to them? Does it seem important?

Share this definition:

Karma: inevitable results of actions, good or bad, either in this life or in a reincarnation.

Ask for participants' initial response. Did they notice the word "inevitable?" Do they feel their actions have inevitable results? Sometimes? Some actions? Always and all actions?

Say, in your own words:

Karma has important implications in some Eastern religions. In both Buddhism and Jainism, dispelling the accumulated effects of one's harmful actions—getting rid of bad karma—is necessary before someone can be fully enlightened and free of the cycle of reincarnation (transmigration of the soul). This accumulation is the work of all the lifetimes a soul has lived, but liberation can be achieved in a single lifetime if the person is dedicated enough.

Ask the youth what they think about this concept. Does it make sense to them? Suggest that whether or not they believe in reincarnation of souls, they might still believe in karma—that is, the idea that negative energy accumulates from our harmful actions. Allow discussion.

You might say:
Some people speak of "instant karma," meaning when they do something bad they are made to suffer for it immediately. Does this idea have meaning for you?

Demonstrate the desk toy Newton's Cradle, if you have one, or the pendulum. Explain that it is named for Newton's Third Law of Motion: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Let the youth play with it for a brief time. Comment that this toy demonstrates nicely the continuation of energy suggested by the concept of karma—when an action is taken, the action itself is not the end of it; there is more, and the outcome is inevitable.

Say:

_The Law of Karma might be stated: "For every action there is an equal and congruent spiritual reaction."_

What is the youth's response to this? Conservation of energy is a fundamental concept of physics. Does this concept extend to the spiritual realm? Do our actions have conservation of momentum in the spiritual as well as the material world?

Continue discussion with these questions:

- What qualifies as a "consequence" to an action? Would you consider realizing you have done something wrong a consequence?
- Have you ever known you have done something wrong but not felt bad about it? If so, was it still wrong? Why? If it was truly wrong, why did you not feel bad?
- Do consequences have to be inevitable for the idea of karma to be an important idea?

Distribute lined paper and pencils/pens. Tell the group that in an episode of the television show "My Name is Earl," the lead character lists all the bad things he remembers doing and sets about apologizing to the people he wronged and trying to do nice things to balance his karma. Earl is not Buddhist, so his approach to clear his karma by apologizing and trying to rectify unpleasant situations he may have caused is a concept more modern American than Eastern. Despite that, do youth think it is a good idea? If so, invite youth to make their karma list, starting with two or three items. Ask them to reflect on how they can rectify a wrong. Remember that an apology is necessary, too. Invite a few volunteers to share their intentions with the group, if they feel inclined. Do youth feel that working on a karma list—whether or not you believe in reincarnation—is in keeping with their Unitarian Universalist values?
WORKSHOP 7:
HANDOUT 1: APHORISMS OF CONFUCIUS

Gathered from online sources including the Quotations Page and the Brainy Quote websites.

1. Those who would perfect their work must first sharpen their tools.
2. Everything has its beauty but not everyone sees it.
3. A youth is to be regarded with respect. How do you know the youth's future will not be equal to or greater than your present?
4. A person who has committed a mistake and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake.
6. One who exercises leadership by means of virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the other stars turn toward it.
7. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.
8. I hear and I know. I see and I remember. I do and I understand.
9. If a person takes no thought of what is distant, sorrow will be near at hand.
10. In errors a person is true to type. Observe the errors and you will know the person.
11. Choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.
12. It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.
13. Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.
14. To move a mountain, one begins by carrying away small stones.
15. They must often change who would be constant in happiness or wisdom.
16. Do not impose on others what you yourself do not desire.
17. Wheresoever you go, go with all your heart.
19. Our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in getting up every time we do.
20. Before embarking on a journey of revenge, dig two graves.
### WORKSHOP 7:
### HANDOUT 2: COMPARATIVE CHART OF EASTERN RELIGIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Zoroastrianism</th>
<th>Jainism</th>
<th>Taoism</th>
<th>Buddhism</th>
<th>Confucianism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year</strong></td>
<td>600 BCE</td>
<td>556 BCE</td>
<td>550 BCE</td>
<td>531 BCE</td>
<td>500 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country</strong></td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prophet / Founder</strong></td>
<td>Zoroaster (Zarathustra)</td>
<td>Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara</td>
<td>Lao Tzu</td>
<td>Siddhartha Gautama</td>
<td>K'ung-fu-tzu (Confucius)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Followers</strong></td>
<td>2.6 Million</td>
<td>4.2 M</td>
<td>20 M</td>
<td>360 M</td>
<td>6 M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ahimsa</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theistic</strong></td>
<td>Monotheistic: Ahura Mazda</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karma</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reincarnation</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender equality</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Called a &quot;philosophy&quot;</strong></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** Ahimsa = Nonviolence; do no harm
**WORKSHOP 7:**
**LEADER RESOURCE 1: 600-500 BCE, EASTERN RELIGIONS HISTORY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zoroastrianism</td>
<td>Jainism</td>
<td>Taoism</td>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>Confucianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founded: 600 BCE</td>
<td>Founder: 556 BCE</td>
<td>Founded: 550 BCE</td>
<td>Founded: 531 BCE</td>
<td>Founded: 500 BCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Founder: Zoroaster (Zarathustra)</td>
<td>Founder: Mahavira</td>
<td>Founder: Lao Tzu</td>
<td>Founder: Siddhartha Gautama</td>
<td>Founder: K'ung-fu-tzu (Confucius)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 million followers</td>
<td>4.2 million followers</td>
<td>20 million followers</td>
<td>360 million followers</td>
<td>6 million followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches ahimsa</td>
<td>Teaches ahimsa</td>
<td>Teaches ahimsa</td>
<td>Teaches ahimsa</td>
<td>Teaches ahimsa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotheistic</td>
<td>Nontheistic</td>
<td>Nontheistic</td>
<td>Nontheistic</td>
<td>Nontheistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not teach karma</td>
<td>Teaches karma</td>
<td>Does not mention karma</td>
<td>Teaches karma</td>
<td>Does not teach karma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not teach reincarnation</td>
<td>Teaches reincarnation</td>
<td>Silent on reincarnation</td>
<td>Teaches reincarnation</td>
<td>Does not teach reincarnation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>Reflected much of the patriarchal thinking of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never called a philosophy</td>
<td>Sometimes called a philosophy</td>
<td>Often called a philosophy</td>
<td>Sometimes called a philosophy</td>
<td>Very often called a philosophy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**WORKSHOP 7:**
**LEADER RESOURCE 2: EASTERN RELIGIONS BACKGROUND**

**In Iran...**

Beginning in 653 BCE, the Assyrian Empire to the east conquered part of the region, the Median Empire was overrun by Scythians, and a new Persian ruler took advantage of the mayhem to seize control. Further victories and defeats, maneuverings, and strategic alliances fed the growth of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. It was a dangerous and unsettling time to live in Iran. Into this maelstrom was born Zarathustra, more commonly known as Zoroaster. A religious leader, Zarathustra preached that God had a single aspect, called Ahura Mazda. Monotheism was a radical shift from the native polytheistic religion of Iran, and many found it profoundly reassuring. Zarathustra taught that Ahura Mazda was in constant relationship with human beings and sought expression through the physical world (water, for example, was a specific expression of God), so in Zoroastrianism, God is physically present in everything a person sees, breathes, eats, or touches. Thus was born Zoroastrianism. The Three Wise Ones of the East who traveled to Bethlehem bringing gifts to the baby Jesus might have been Zoroastrians.

**In India...**

The ancient tribal structure of society was disintegrating, forming instead into regional kingdoms. Change in age-old social structure was profoundly unsettling, and made more difficult by the maneuverings for power and land among the new leaders, always dangerous to ordinary civilians. Into this atmosphere were born Vardhamana and Siddhartha Gautama, both of whom would later be known by different names: Mahavira and the Buddha. In the Hindu tradition, a teacher is often honored with a different name upon reaching a high level of spiritual attainment, and both the names Mahavira and Buddha are honorifics, "Mahavira" (muh-hah-VEER-uh) meaning "Great Hero" and "Buddha" meaning "awakened one" or "enlightened one." Both the Buddha and Mahavira were born into the ruling warrior caste in India. Both as young adults left their privileged lives to follow a spiritual path. Both sought for years, attained enlightenment, and devoted the rest of their lives to teaching what they had learned. Buddha taught the Middle Way: strong self discipline, yet with neither self-indulgence nor self-denial. Mahavira was 24th in a line of tirthankara ("pathmakers" or great teachers); however, he is credited with founding Jainism since he distilled the teachings of many centuries. Mahavira's central teaching, the most fundamental principle of Jainism, was ahimsa, "nonviolence"—do no harm to any living thing, and do as much good as possible. While the Buddha also taught ahimsa, the lengths the Jains went to not cause harm was extreme by comparison. The teachings of both Mahavira and the Buddha were for women as well as men, for people of all castes or classes, and provided clear guidelines for living a good life and making spiritual progress. This accessibility and clarity were profoundly reassuring for a populace whose social fabric was unraveling.

**In China...**

The sixth century BCE was the end of the Spring and Autumn period of Chinese history. After more than 100 years of invasions, strategic alliances, and broken treaties, warlords were consolidating kingdoms and wiping out smaller adversaries. Creativity is a frequent outlet for human anxiety, and in China, as in India and Iran, this was a time of surpassingly beautiful art
and scientific innovation. The blisteringly fast rate of cultural change, political upheaval, and everyday danger in China created an atmosphere where people were ready for the calming, interconnecting philosophies of Taoism as taught by Lao Tzu, and the down-to-earth practicality of the teachings of K'ung-fu-tzu, known by Westerners as Confucius. Taoism and Confucianism provided ballast and meaning in a physical world that was anything but predictable. Many Chinese today still practice both Taoism and Confucianism. The strict, ethical guidelines of how to be in humane relationship with other people of Confucianism is seen to balance the less structured and less directional Taoism.

**Shared Beliefs:**

There is one particular belief on which all five faiths agree: ahimsa, the doctrine of nonviolence.

Four out of the five religions are noteworthy for the concept of gender equality. Looked at through a social justice lens, we see these two doctrines are related. Treating people unequally does harm, so a full and logical application of ahimsa would require gender equality. By "gender equality" we mean that these religions did not give one set of instructions to males and one to females. It does not imply that societies founded on these religions did not or do not exhibit proscribed gender roles, such as which gender is presumed to take care of the home and children and which gender is given preferential treatment in education. It is not unusual to find a culture among religious societies that does not reflect all aspects of a religion's doctrine. This can be seen by the fact that Confucianism, based strongly on cultural practices of its founding time, reflects many patriarchal attitudes, such as how wives should be obedient, while also emphasizing the value of both men and women.

**Other parallels among these faiths:**

- All are creedal. They teach specific ideas, as enduring truth.
- All are prophetic faiths, created from the teachings of inspired human beings.
- All but Zoroastrianism are nontheistic. Of the five founders, only Zarathustra taught the existence of a literal God. The existence or nonexistence of God is immaterial to Jainism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism.
- All are nonjudgmental. None of these five preached theirs as the only way to enlightenment or salvation. Zoroastrianism, while it teaches that the good will go to heaven and the bad to hell, does not require that people be Zoroastrian to be considered good. Further, hell is a temporary place: Zoroastrians, like our Universalist forebears, believe in universal salvation.
- All except Zoroastrianism are sometimes called philosophies since they do not require belief in a literal God. Usually, however, Buddhism and Jainism are considered religions, Taoism less so. Confucianism is most commonly considered, "a philosophy with a religious function," and is sometimes called a Chinese example of humanism. However, as we saw when discussing Hinduism, the distinction between a religion and a philosophy is not terribly significant to Eastern thought. Many Easterners would answer the religion versus philosophy question by saying their faith is both/and: both a religion and a philosophy.
WORKSHOP 7:
LEADER RESOURCE 3: JAIN SYMBOL

Provided by Elembis.

The Jain Hand symbolizes the Jain Vow of Ahimsa, or nonviolence. The Sanskrit word in the middle of the palm is "ahimsa." The wheel represents the dharma (teachings) of Jainism, through which Jains seek to attain rational perception and ultimately freedom from the cycle of transmigration (reincarnation).
FIND OUT MORE

Ahimsa

A yoga teacher in Santa Cruz offers on her website the page Ahimsa: Non-Harming (at www.yogawithamey.com/ahimsa.html), a very nice page on ahimsa, the path to true nonviolence.

The article "The Concepts of Ahimsa or Nonviolence" (at www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/concepts/ahimsa.asp) by Jayaram V, on the HinduWebsite (at www.hinduwebsite.com/), details how ancient and contemporary Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists have practiced ahimsa in daily life.

Jainism


"Gender and the Tao" (at taoism.about.com/od/roleofwomengender/a/gender.htm)" by Elizabeth Reninger, on the About.com website.

Zoroastrianism

The article "Rise of the Achaemenid Empire" (at persianempire.info/Achaemens.htm) on the Persian Empire Info website describes Iran (Persia) in the time of Zarathustra. A further article, "Origins and Beliefs of Zorastrianism," (at persianempire.info/zoro.htm) sets the religion’s development in Persia and Western Asia in a social context.

"Indra's Jeweled Net"

This story was also published in the Fall, 2010 UU World full-color insert Families: Weave a Tapestry of Faith with reflections and activity suggestions on the theme "O, Sparkling World of Difference." Download the Family pages (at www.uua.org/documents/uuworld/families/10_fall.pdf) from the UUA website.