

### 3. UNITY

Thirdly, a Unitarian believes in unity, as the name of the movement implies. Beyond all divisions within the universe, within humanity and within the individual personality, there is an underlying unity. The life of each one of us needs to function as a harmonious whole. In particular, religion cannot be segregated into some detached compartment of life. A Unitarian is not fearful that scientific discovery will undermine religion, nor that new ideas will destroy anything of value that has been inherited from the past.

### 4. ACTION

Fourthly, a Unitarian is a person whose commitment expresses itself in action. Much as Unitarians like to talk, their religion is at root a way of life rather than a web of words. This means that a Unitarian will work to strengthen those influences that make for human solidarity and against those tending toward bigotry and exclusiveness, whether national, racial or religious. The Unitarian tradition, as it has evolved during the more than four centuries of the movement's existence, has expressed itself in the repeated championing of progressive ideas, many of which were far from popular at the time but have subsequently been vindicated by history.

### ISN'T THERE MORE?

People whose ideas of religion have been shaped by conventional influences may find it hard to understand how a religious movement can be built upon such principles, rather than upon shared creeds and doctrines. The questions such people ask are often too small. They may ask whether Unitarians believe in God, without any prior attempt to come to grips with the question of what "believing in God" really means.

Or they ask: "Are Unitarians Christians?" and expect that the answer will be "Yes" or "No." Life is seldom quite that simple. It does not reduce itself to neat clear-cut categories. A person's theology is expressed more in the way that a person lives than in what he or she puts into words.

A Unitarian may profess allegiance to Christianity or to any other of the great religious traditions of the world, but not in any exclusive sense. In becoming a Unitarian, one does not repudiate such allegiances, but simply places them in a universal context.

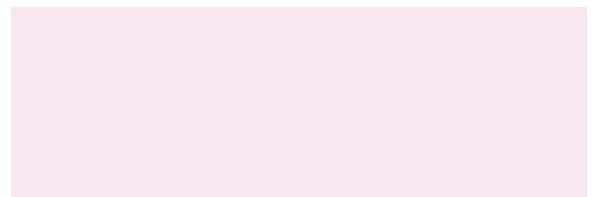
Most Unitarians are not very concerned about the labels people may choose to pin on them. They're more concerned with what lies behind labels, and they know that labels seldom convey this very adequately.

### BECOMING A UNITARIAN ISN'T EASY

Perhaps, after all, it is better to think in terms of becoming more and more of a Unitarian, rather than saying flatly, "I am one!" For none of us measures up to the whole of the description of a Unitarian as given above. An individual may come to share more and more fully in these attitudes and ideas and activities as time goes by, but no one dares claim that the destination has been fully and finally reached. It might be truer to say that a Unitarian is a person who is in the process of becoming one.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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# HOW DO I BECOME A UNITARIAN?

by Phillip Hewett

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was talking to the first Unitarian I had ever, to my knowledge, met.

Only a few months had passed since I had first read a description of Unitarians and had sent for Unitarian literature. I had become excited enough by what I read to want to talk things over with the nearest Unitarian minister. At the end of an hour's discussion I asked: "And how do I become a Unitarian?"

### HIS ANSWER WAS UNEXPECTED

"You don't have to *become* a Unitarian," he said. "You *are* one." While I had been plying him with questions about Unitarians, he had been quietly sizing me up and had noted where I stood in my attitudes and questionings. He knew that I was a Unitarian before I did.

I felt a little deflated at the time. I had expected to hear about processes of initiation through which I would have to pass before I had any right to call myself a Unitarian. I can still recapture that feeling occasionally, when talking with newcomers to our church. But in the years that have passed since my first discussion with a Unitarian, I have never had cause to doubt the substantial accuracy of the reply I was then given.

Certainly there was a process of initiation. But I was already almost through it by the time I realised what was going on. I had already become a Unitarian without knowing it. The only change was that now I knew it. What this meant in practice was that a door had been opened into a community of like-minded people whose questions and doubts and affirmations and general response to life were to strengthen and support me in my own.

It had been a case of "in the beginning was the word," but I later came to feel the full force of Martin Buber's pithy phrase "in the beginning is relation." It was a community within which I could go on growing that I was really seeking, and I look back gratefully to the members of that community who accepted and encouraged me. I was adopted into a family, and gained much from an exploration of the family tree.

### HOW DOES ONE BECOME A UNITARIAN?

The question is always difficult to answer in a few words, for the Unitarian approach to life cannot be pinned down in a few neat definitions. But it is not so difficult to recognize when you meet one, though, as in my own case, another person may recognize you as a Unitarian before you have become fully aware of it yourself.

So, what are the marks of a person to whom it would be fair to say: *You don't have to become a Unitarian! You are one?*

### 1. QUESTIONS

First of all, a Unitarian asks serious questions about life. Not all the time, of course. Unitarians know how to relax and enjoy each other's company as well as taking time to wrestle with the really important issues. But those issues are always there and have to be taken seriously by anyone who is not content simply to drift through life without any sense of purpose. What meaning can we give to this whole mysterious process of living, and where is it taking us as we move on from day to day and from year to year?

A Unitarian will neither evade such questions nor accept the ready-made answers to them provided by one or another of the bewildering range of "authorities," ancient and modern. The final responsibility for one's personal response to life has to be one's own, however much help one may always get from others.

It might be truer to say that a Unitarian is a person who is in the process of becoming one.

### 2. COMMUNITY

The acceptance of individual responsibility is only a point of departure. A Unitarian accepts, in the second place, the universal human need to share in community. Neither at the level of thought nor at that of feeling can the isolated individual find fulfilment. Unitarians love to test their ideas and attitudes against those of other people. This can be done by reading, but more important is the two-way communication that takes place in discussion with those whose integrity one can respect, even though their point of view may be very different from one's own.

A Unitarian is eager to hear what the greatest minds of past and present from all parts of the world have had to say on the essential issues of life. A Unitarian congregation provides the setting within which people

can explore and celebrate together. No one has to put up a false front. One can express one's own authentic self, and find that there is always room for further growth.

A Unitarian gets more than intellectual stimulation through sharing thus in the life of a congregation. There is also the deep sense of fellowship arising out of being a member of a group united by mutual respect and acceptance of one another, rather than by the artificial acceptance of some preordained creed. The support of such a group can sustain those who feel compelled on grounds of personal integrity to take a stand for principles other than those casually accepted by the majority of people. This is of enormous help.

Within a Unitarian congregation the members join in friendships and mutual support, in candid discussion, in working for social improvement, and in that celebration of what is of ultimate worth that has traditionally been called worship.