



# The Utah Humanist

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**H**umanists of Utah is a Chapter of the *American Humanist Association*.

We are a nonprofit corporation organized to advocate and promote ethical, rational, and democratic humanism among our membership and the larger community.



**Humanism** is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,

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## President's Report

Hello, humanists! These are strange times indeed and I hope that you are making the best of this new reality. I wanted to share a few thoughts on crisis perception in a historical context.

Historically, mass pandemics have been noted primarily for the sickness, suffering and deaths. This is understandable for obvious reasons. But positive outcomes have been produced in the aftermath of these scourges, transformations that altered history in major ways. An example of this is the arrival of the Black Death in Italy in 1347 CE, where between one third and one half of Europe would succumb. For most people at this time, it seemed the end of the world was near. In addition to climate challenges and geopolitical upheaval, the Black Death upended religious authority, catalyzed xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism, and disrupted demographics—quite simply, the bonds of society fell apart in a frenzied storm of panic to avoid contagion. And yet, a rebirth emerged from the ashes that would push the continent toward the Renaissance and emergence of humanist ideals. With about half the labor force gone, the remaining workers became more valuable and were able to negotiate not only higher wages, but decreased rent and keeping more livestock and crops for themselves to sell and use. Lifespans increased, women entered the workforce in larger numbers, and the resulting disposable income influenced everything from fashion to food to crafts and mercantile.

Right now, there are hopeful changes occurring as well. Stay-at-home orders, social distancing and the glaring absence of effective national leadership and medical supply chain contingencies have bought time for us to reflect on our society and what we want to make it. We have time to take walks, to check in on loved ones, to finish that book on the shelf, and so forth. And when we have time to truly look at our world, we see wonderful things happening right now. The canals of Venice are crystal clear for the first time in decades, with swans and porpoises returning to them. Pollution has plummeted in hotspots all over the world, giving people blue skies for the first time in a long time. Pakistan just hired 63,000 people to plant 10 billion trees in an effort to merge nature and employment needs.

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# Meaning of Freedom

*Originally published in July 1998 as that month's Discussion Group Report.*

"When I became convinced that the universe is natural—that all the ghosts and gods are myths, there entered into my brain, into my soul, into every drop of my blood, the sense, the feeling, the joy of freedom. The walls of my prison crumbled and fell, the dungeon was flooded with light, and all the bolts and bars and manacles became dust. I was no longer a servant, a serf, or a slave. There was for me no master in all the wide world—not even in infinite space. I was free—free to think, to express my thoughts—free to live with my own ideal—free to live for myself and those I loved—free to use all my faculties, all my senses—free to spread imagination's wings—free to investigate, to guess and dream and hope—free to judge and determine for myself—free to reject all ignorant and cruel creeds, all the "inspired" books that savages have produced, and all the barbarous legends of the past—free from sanctified mistakes and holy lies—free from the fear of eternal pain—free from the winged monsters of the night—free from devils, ghosts, and gods. For the first time I was free. There were no prohibited places in all the realms of thought—no air, no space, where fancy could not spread her painted wings—no chains for my limbs—no lashes for my back—no fires for my flesh—no master's frown or threat—no following another's steps—no need to bow, or cringe, or crawl or utter lying words. I was free. I stood erect and fearlessly, joyously faced all worlds.

"And then my heart was filled with gratitude, with thankfulness, and went out in love to all the heroes, the thinkers who gave their lives for the liberty of hand and brain—for the freedom of labor and thought—to those who fell on the fierce fields of war, to those who died in dungeons bound in chains—to those by fire consumed—to all the wise, the good, the brave of every land, whose thoughts and deeds have given freedom to the sons of men. And then I vowed to grasp the torch that they had held, and hold it high, that light might conquer darkness still."

—Robert Green Ingersoll

"Rarely will a high-school student of today encounter the name of Robert G. Ingersoll," says Gordon Stein, editor of the *Encyclopedia of Unbelief*. Nor will most college history students. Yet during the latter part of his lifetime, he was perhaps the best-known and most listened to American alive. From about 1880 to his death in 1899, he probably spoke to more Americans in person than anyone before or since. He had audiences of as many as 3,000 people a night several months a year while he was on tour. In those days it was very rare for an unbeliever to be allowed to speak publicly; yet he lectured nightly to thousands of people against organized religion and received front-page coverage. This situation struck fear in the hearts of many clergymen. They struck back with mud-slinging, but he led such a "squeaky clean" life that no mud would stick. He was a close friend of U.S. presidents.

He believed that nothing was "sacred" or immune to discussion. He felt that mild satire often could make people consider the error of their views when straight discussion could not. He attacked the idea of the literal truth of the Bible relentlessly. He showed how the Bible was largely responsible for the prevailing attitudes toward slavery, women's inferior position, and much of the hypocrisy and injustice of the world. He decried the idea that belief in the Bible or religion was necessary to morality or worthiness as a human being. He pointed out what he thought was wrong with the design of the world; he said that if he were designing the world, he "would make good health catching instead of disease." He advocated equal rights for women and all races, civil liberties, and responsible care of the natural environment. He opposed any limitation on freedom of speech, including criticizing religion. He called science "the only possible savior of mankind."

His view of life was, "Happiness is the only good. The place to be happy is here. The time to be happy is now. The way to be happy is to make others so."

—Richard Layton



# Chaplain's Corner

## It is NOT Social Distancing

When I was young, I wanted to be a wizard, and this was years before Harry Potter; although I had devoured all the fantasy I could find. I have therefore been delighted to learn that I can cast spells! We are all wizards, wizards with our words. Words matter. The way we think about things and the way we describe them literally changes the way our bodies experience them. To shift the metaphor, with words we program our minds, our bodies, our relationships, and even the world.



Therefore, it is important to be as precise, clear, and accurate with the words we use. And why I recommend that we stop using the term “Social Distancing” and start calling it “Physical Distancing.”

Physical distancing is hard, no doubt about it. I am sure even the most introverted among us are aching for hugs. I was completely alone for over a month, and I would have been so happy just to have a cat! I love cats and am a big believer in the healing power of animals. I visited my children at their mom’s, and it was so hard not to be able to hug them. I was so relieved a few weeks later when we had a proper visit, and when they were able to come to my house.

I attended a training on “Grief in the Time of COVID” and the grief counselor made the painfully accurate point that physical distancing compromises the core ways we manage grief as humans. When we grieve, we spend time together. We hug each other. We gather together and we share meals. We cry together. Touch is so important. It takes a twenty second hug to release oxytocin, which lowers stress hormones and increases health. This is definitely a time to appreciate safe sources of physical contact. And we are all

grieving how difficult and rare simple touch has become.

As difficult as Physical Distancing is, it is not Social Distancing. True Social Distancing would isolate us. I have found that physical distancing requirements has actually INCREASED my social reaches, and I imagine that is true of many of you as well. I have been far more consistent about reading my children bedtime stories via FaceTime and the Echo Dot than when they were in the same house with me! One of the great blessings and curses of being human is our ability to adapt quickly to pretty much anything; known as “habituation.” Therefore, we only appreciate things when they are gone, or at least at risk. Change and disruption wake us up.

I hope we can be as responsible as possible when it comes to Physical Distancing. And may we stop using the term Social Distancing. May we instead use every method at our disposal to reach out to those we love, to connect and care for each other in safe ways. One of the blessings of this pandemic is that we will never take closeness for granted again. And until we can once again hug each other, we will nurture and strengthen relationships from a distance.

—**Jared Anderson** (MA, BCC) is endorsed by the AHA Humanist Society as a Chaplain, Celebrant, and Lay Leader. He provides rituals across the life span for birth, coming of age, and divorce, as well as weddings and funerals. He specializes in designing personalized ceremonies that integrate ideas from art, history and popular culture. Contact him at [jared@humanistsofutah.org](mailto:jared@humanistsofutah.org)



# Humanism 101

# President's Report

I want to introduce a new monthly column, Humanism 101. Each column will address different aspects and approaches to humanism. My favorite definition of humanism is “A human-centered approach to life”, in case any of your friends ask you to explain it. I have found that this human-centered approach to life is a powerful approach in every way: personal, relational, and professional. I will broadly organize content into Humanism Past, Humanism Present, Humanism Future. I look forward to exploring the human experience together with you.

Humanism Past will explore the history of Humanism. We will look at the rise of modern explicit Humanism which began with the French Revolution, as well as

Humanism Present will focus on ways that we can integrate humanism to enrich our everyday lives, but it will also discuss the ways that humanism impacts our world, mostly implicitly. You can tell others that we are ALL humanists, because the modern world is humanist.

Humanism Future will highlight present issues and approaches our world faces, and how humanism is and might address them.

I will also be sharing helpful resources to continue your own learning quest. Here a few recommended books to get you started:

- Stephen Law, *Humanism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- Dale McGowan and Anthony Pinn, eds. *Everyday Humanism* (Bristol: Equinox, 2014).
- Greg Epstein, *Good without God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009)
- Anthony Pinn, ed. *What is Humanism and Why Does it Matter?* (Bristol: Acumen, 2013).

I also cannot recommend highly enough Huval Harari’s trilogy of the human experience:

- *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper, 2015)
- *21 Lessons for the 21 Century* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2018)
- *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017)

—Jared Anderson

*(Continued from page 1)*

Leatherback turtles are making a swift comeback after beaches in Thailand and Florida were shut down. Friends and families are connecting in more meaningful names and embracing technology en masse to do so. The old adage “Nature abhors a vacuum” has proven immutable—and it is up to us to determine what will fill that vacuum.

The events of COVID-19 have changed the lenses through which many people view their lives. Depending with whom you talk, the future may seem dystopian, chaotic and fearful or it may seem utopian, hopeful and resolute—with the vast majority of people on a sliding scale between these. But it is the fact that we are visual creatures that enables us to see not only through our eyes, but also in our minds. And here is where we will determine our future, not by observing but by playing an active role in choosing the colors, determining the brushstrokes and finally painting our desires in society. Every crisis has two sides and the opportunism of humanists for the good will play a pivotal part in keeping the momentum of change for the positive moving forward. Stay positive and look for the silver lining during these touch times!

—Jeff Curtis  
President, HoU



**H**umanists of Utah meetings are open to the public and free of any admission charge. A discussion and light refreshments follow the speaker's presentation. Come join us and **bring a friend!**

**D**isclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Humanists of Utah nor the American Humanist Association. Reprinting of articles is permitted for humanist groups promoting the interests of humanism if attribution is properly stated.



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>> Put Your Name Here <<  
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# Elle the Humanist

An aspiring 9-year-old local author recently published a book about humanism titled *Elle the Humanist!* She was interviewed on channel 4's Good Things Utah show to talk about it.

Click on the picture below to see the four and half minute YouTube video.



## Membership/Renewal Application

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

- \$50 Regular Annual Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$90 Regular 2-year Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$35 Regular Annual Membership with email delivery of the Utah Humanist
  - \$65 Regular 2-year Membership with email delivery of the Utah Humanist
  - \$20 *Student* Annual Membership and subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$20 Annual subscription to the Utah Humanist (I do not want to be listed as a member of **Humanists of Utah**)
  - Please send a *FREE* trial Subscription to the Utah Humanist
  - \$\_\_\_\_\_ additional contribution to help promote public awareness of humanism
- ⇒ All contributions in excess of the \$20 subscription fee tax deductible.  
 ⇒ *Members* have the right to vote in Chapter elections and participate in Chapter decisions.  
 ⇒ Dues provide for information packets, honoraria to speakers, expenses of newsletter publication, trial subscriptions, copies to libraries, and newsletter exchange with other chapters.

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**Now you can pay online with PayPal!**

## Notes:

- ◆ *General Meetings* are for all members and the general public. There are no admission charges.
- ◆ *Discussion Group* meetings are open to everyone. A different book or topic is covered every month.
- ◆ *Board Meetings* are planning and business sessions. They are open to all members.
- ◆ Eliot Hall is in the First Unitarian Church located at 569 South 1300 East in Salt Lake City.
- ◆ RE 201 is upstairs in the East Educational Building at the First Unitarian Church.

## Charitable Giving While You Shop

### Amazon.com

Sign up for Amazon Smile and a percentage of your purchase will be donated to HoU:

- Log into amazon.com and open your personal account settings.
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- Search for “Humanists of Utah.”

This will find “American Humanist Association” in West Jordan because we use the AHA as our umbrella for sales tax exemption.

- Click the “Select” button.

If you have a bookmark for Amazon please modify it to go to smile.amazon.com—you always want to use the “smile” option.



### Smith's Grocery Stores

Humanists of Utah is enrolled in Smith's Inspiring Donations program. If you have a Smith's Fresh Value card, you can register it to benefit Humanists of Utah. Simply visit [www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire](http://www.smithsfoodanddrug.com/inspire), create an account, associate it with your Fresh Values card number, and then enter NPO Number: KQ330 within your “account summary.” All future purchases will now benefit HoU.



# Upcoming Events

All Public Meetings are  
**CANCELLED** until further notice

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