

Preparation for B122 — What Does It Mean To Be Human?

“It takes courage to ask a question and truly pay heed to the answer ... From the highest level to the most practical level, all real questions come about from the pain of separation, the separation from the answer ... We are merely instruments through which the question can be asked and through which the question can be answered.”

- Reshad Feild

This is the last session in our Big Questions series for 2005. In fact, it's so Big that we probably rarely, if ever, truly think about it. The question could be approached from many different perspectives: scientific, historical, physiological, philosophical, spiritual, emotional, even humorous. There are many certainties and many ambiguities, too. There could be as many answers as you have group members present on this day. Enjoy the discussion!

1. To you, what is it about us that makes us “human”?
2. Of all the perspectives mentioned in the paragraph above (scientific, historical, etc.), which is the first one that comes to you when you think about this question? Why?
3. There are so many differences between humans. Does it ever occur to you that there is no single answer to this question?
4. Do you ever compare us to other species? What are your conclusions?
5. Have there been times in your own life when you have felt more “human”? Less “human”? (For example, have there been times you have felt more in touch with your "animal" nature than your "human" nature?)
6. Do you think your answer to this question might have been different at different times in your life? Why is that?
7. What are the most important gifts of being human?
8. What are the most important challenges of being human?
9. Are humans more “good” or more “evil”? Explain why you feel that way.

Further Reading (with different perspectives)

- *The Monkey in the Mirror: Essays on the Science of What Makes us Human*, by Ian Tattersall
- *What Does It Mean to Be Human? Reverence for Life Reaffirmed by Responses from Around the World*, compiled and Edited by Frederick Franck, Janis Roze, and Richard Connolly, 2000, St. Martin's Press.
- “Self-Culture: What does it mean to be human?” Rev. Jim Eller, All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church of Kansas City. <http://www.allsoulskc.org/sermons/001126.html>
- “What Does it Mean to be Human?” Teresa Iglesias, D.Phil., Fellow of The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, <http://www.consciencelaws.org/Examining-Conscience-Issues/Ethical/Articles/Ethical46.html>