



Compassionate Living

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Adapted by Betsy Beach from a session by the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Cookeville.

Cookeville, TN. Date: January 2022

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: Exploring Who We Are

Under the right circumstances, playing with fire is a delight - imagine being gathered round a fire pit as the crackling flames invite us to sing, dance, and roast a marshmallow or two.

Our chalice also invites us to play, although with ideas rather than with marshmallows. The flame encourages us to explore who we are, who our neighbors are, and where we are on our spiritual journeys. Today, we light this chalice in the spirit of play. Let us trust the light to guide us in this hour and in the days to come, finding joy along the way. -Melanie Davis

Personal Check In: Briefly share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Words: The Legacy of Caring

Despair is my private pain

Born from what I have failed to say

failed to do

failed to overcome.

Be still my inner self

let me rise to you

let me reach down into your pain

and soothe you.

I turn to you

to renew my life

I turn to the world

the streets of the city

the worn tapestries of

brokerage firms

-Rev. Thandeka, from *Becoming: A Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood*

crack dealers

private estates

personal things in the bag lady's cart

rage and pain in the faces that turn from me

afraid of their own inner worlds.

This common world I love anew

as the life blood of generations

who refused to surrender their humanity

in an inhumane world

courses through my veins.

From within this world

my despair is transformed to hope

and I begin anew

the legacy of caring.

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. How does your self-talk influence your compassion towards yourself and your compassion towards others? Do you practice self-compassion? How? How often?
2. How do you practice showing compassion to those you love? To those who challenge you?
3. What spiritual practices help you to practice compassion?
4. Do you struggle to feel compassion in times of crisis? What helps you to overcome these struggles?
5. How has social distancing affected how you practice compassion?

Sitting in Silence (Reflect on questions just posed as you prepare to hear readings)

Readings- Quotes and Readings- see below

Sharing - This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share responses to one or more of the session questions.

(This is usually a good time to take a brief break)

Open Discussion -This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared their thoughts on this topic. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing reading:

When all is quiet and we are small and the night is dark, may we hear the tender breathing of all who lie awake with us in fear, that together we may gather strength to live with love, and kindness, and confidence.

- Jane Ranney Rzepka

Announcements/Plans

Check out: As we close today, how are you feeling now?, Is there anything from this session that you plan to take with you into the rest of the week?

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Readings:

When I accept my own brokenness, and do not judge myself harshly because of it, I find myself capable of more compassion towards others regardless of whether I am aware of the form of brokenness they've experienced. -Rosalina Chai, *Beauty of the Mosaic*, <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2138>

Compassion allows us to use our own pain and the pain of others as a vehicle for connection. This is a delicate and profound path. We may be averse to seeing our own suffering because it tends to ignite a blaze of self-blame and regret. And we may be averse to seeing suffering in others because we find it unbearable or distasteful, or we find it threatening to our own happiness. All of these possible reactions to the suffering in the world make us want to turn away from life. In contrast, compassion manifests in us as the offering of kindness rather than withdrawal. Because compassion is a state of mind that is itself open, abundant and inclusive, it allows us to meet pain more directly. With direct seeing, we know that we are not alone in our suffering and that no one need feel alone when in pain. Seeing our oneness is the beginning of compassion, and it allows us to reach beyond aversion and separation. -Sharon Salzberg, in *The Kindness Handbook*

Unless we are very, very careful, we doom each other by holding onto images of one another based on preconceptions that are in turn based on indifference to what is other than ourselves. This indifference can be, in its extreme, a form of murder and seems to me a rather common phenomenon. We claim autonomy for ourselves and forget that in so doing we can fall into the tyranny of defining other people as we would like them to be. By focusing on what we choose to acknowledge in them, we impose an insidious control on them. I notice that I have to pay careful attention in order to listen to others with an openness that allows them to be as they are, or as they think themselves to be. The shutters of my mind habitually flip open and click shut, and these little snaps form into patterns I arrange for myself. The opposite of this inattention is love, is the honoring of others in a way that grants them the grace of their own autonomy and allows mutual discovery.[...]Compassion is one of the purest springs of love.

-Anne Truitt, in *Daybook: the Journal of an Artist*

I believe that at every level of society - familial, tribal, national and international - the key to a happier and more successful world is the growth of compassion. We do not need to become religious, nor do we need to believe in an ideology. All that is necessary is for each of us to develop our good human qualities. I try to treat whoever I meet as an old friend. This gives me a genuine feeling of happiness. It is the practice of compassion. -The 14th Dalai Lama, <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion-and-human-values/compassion>

It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals, because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. -Anne Frank

Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. -Bryan Stevenson, American lawyer, social justice activist, founder/executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. <https://eji.org/>

We can't be compassionate when we are "othering". -Rev. Deanna Lack

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. - Maya Angelou