



Deep Listening, Living Love Through the Practice of Deep Listening

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan, based on material from Soul Matters-Small Group: Living Love Through the Practice of Deep Listening, October 2024. Compiled and adapted by Kris Seitz, October, 2024.

Spiritual Exercise – to be done before the Covenant Circle meeting (optional)

Lectio Divina and Listening for a Text to Speak

This year our monthly themes are framed as practices, as a way of inviting us to think more deeply about our historic UU commitment to “deeds, not creeds.” With that in mind, this exercise invites you to try out a deep listening practice developed by our Christian siblings. It’s called Lectio Divina, which translates to “divine reading.” You can learn more about it [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

The basic idea is to deeply listen to a text by reading it multiple times through a different reflective lens each time. You can also think of it as bringing different discernment questions to the text, with each question inviting you to listen to the text in a new way. It’s all about bringing greater intentionality to a text so that it “speaks” to you, or so that your inner voice can speak to you through the text.

Here’s our suggested instructions, which honor the traditional approach but add a few Soul Matters twists:

- Start by picking a text. Poems are usually best, so pick a favorite poem you want to revisit. You can also choose from [THIS LIST OF POETRY](#) that we’ve put together.
- Center yourself. Sit quietly for a couple of minutes. Or do some deep breathing.
- For the **first reading**, read it aloud and simply **focus on the feelings** it evokes. During and after reading, ask yourself: What is the dominant feeling I am experiencing? Which part of the poem evoked the strongest emotional response? What happened in your body as you read the text?
- For the **second reading**, focus on which phrase or line “**pops out**” at you or “**shimmers**” as you read it. Then reflect afterward on that phrase or line, asking: Why is this line hooking me? What is my inner voice trying to say to me through it? How is my inner wisdom trying to get me to look at or wrestle with something through this line/phrase?
- For the **third reading**, focus on what **memories** arise. Before, during and after you read, hold in your mind questions such as “What memories are being stirred?” or “What memory does this poem want to reconnect me with?” Afterward, reflect on the question of, “What does this memory want me to do with it?” or “What does this memory of the past want to say to me about my present?”
- For the **fourth and final reading**, ask yourself, “How is my inner voice and deepest self trying to offer me a **message of comfort or challenge** through this poem?”
- If you are up for another reading or want to swap one of the above out, consider using this question to guide you: “Who am I in the text? Which character, object or action represents me and where I’m at right now?”

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

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

Opening Words:

To listen is very hard, because it asks of us so much interior stability that we no longer need to prove ourselves by speeches, arguments, statements, or declarations. True listeners no longer have an inner need to make their presence known. They are free to receive, to welcome, to accept. ~Henri Nouwen

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. Have you ever heard the ocean or the woods or the sky speak? If so, how might their words still be relevant for you today?
2. How good are you at listening compassionately to yourself?
3. What would the world sound like to you without noise that gets in the way? What noise gets in your way the most: The noise of self-doubt? Striving? Scarcity? Jealousy? Regret? Something else?
4. If you could go back to a conversation and correct how you listened, what conversation would that be?
5. Has being listened to ever felt like being *loved*? Describe your feelings.

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

Readings- Words from the Common Bowl: Quotes/Readings

The first duty of love is to listen. ~ Paul Tillich

The real “work” of prayer is to become silent and listen to the voice that says good things about me . . . and calls (me) beloved. . . To pray is to let that voice speak to the center of your being, to your guts, and let that voice resound in your whole being. ~ Henri Nouwen

The forest breathes. Listen. It answers. . .
If what a tree or a branch does is lost on you,
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows
Where you are. You must let it find you.
~ David Wagoner

We have, at least a lot of us have, awesome instincts. If we listen hard enough to our own hearts, we notice when the whispers become fervent little screams: “That! That! That’s what I want more of. That’s what I crave to understand. That’s the kind of person/mountain/book I want to be near. That’s the way I want to feel.”
~ Courtney E. Martin

When someone deeply listens to you it is like holding out a dented cup you’ve had since childhood and watching it fill up with cold, fresh water. When it balances on the top of the brim, you are understood. When it overflows and touches your skin, you are loved. ~ John Fox

Interrupting sends a variety of messages. It says: "I'm more important than you are." "What I have to say is more interesting, accurate, or relevant." "This isn't a conversation; it's a contest and I'm going to win".

~ Diane Schilling

Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am. ~ Parker Palmer

Our bodies are telling the stories we have avoided or forgotten how to hear- and sometimes our inability to feel our feelings (the messages that precede the alarm bells) means that our bodies have to scream in order to get some attention. ~ Hillary L. McBride

Our listening creates sanctuary for the homeless parts within the other person. ~Rachel Naomi Remen

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 or the readings.

(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:

This is your chance to listen carefully. Your whole life might depend on what you hear. ~ Joyce Sutphen

Announcements/Plans

Check out: As we close today, how are you feeling now?

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. ~ Elizabeth Selle Jones