



The First Source: Direct experience of mystery & wonder

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

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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: “The living tradition we share draws from many Sources: [The first of these sources is] direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life.” —**From Singing the Living Tradition, First Source in List of Sources in Preface, UUA**

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. How have you directly experienced the transcendent in your life?
2. What is a time you have experienced something that has transformed you or renewed your spirit?
3. How have you gained wisdom from your direct experience of the world?
4. How do you cultivate a sense of mystery and wonder in your life?

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

Readings- Words from the Common Bowl: Quotes/Readings (see end of document)

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 one or more responses to 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: “I believe that if, on every Sunday morning before going to church, we could be lifted to a mountain-peak and see a horizon line of six hundred miles enfolding the copious splendor of the light on such a varied expanse; or if we could look upon a square mile of flowers representing all the species with which the Creative Spirit embroiders a zone; or if we could be made to realize the distance of the earth from the sun, the light of which travels every morning

twelve millions of miles a minute to feed and bless us, and which the force of gravitation pervades without intermission to hold our globe calmly in its orbit and on its poise; if we could fairly perceive, through our outward senses, one or two features of the constant order and glory of nature, our materialistic dullness would be broken, surprise and joy would be awakened, we should feel that we live amid the play of Infinite thought; and the devout spirit would be stimulated so potently that our hearts would naturally mount in praise and prayer.”
— **Universalist and Unitarian minister Rev. Thomas Starr King, from a 1863 sermon entitled “Lessons from the Sierra Nevada”**

Announcements/Plans

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

Extinguish the Chalice

Readings- Words from the Common Bowl: Quotes/Readings:

“The sacred is present and available to us -wherever we look or are willing to find it. If we remain open and expectant—watching out of the corners of our eyes, keeping our ears cocked, putting away all preconceived ideas—our lives will emanate the sacred.”

— **Rev. Abhi Prakash Janamanchi, Unitarian Universalist minister, from "Becoming: A Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood"**

"All around us lies what we neither understand nor use. Our capacities, our instincts for this our present sphere are but half developed. Let us confine ourselves to that till the lesson be learned; let us be completely natural; before we trouble ourselves with the supernatural. I never see any of these things but I long to get away and lie under a green tree and let the wind blow on me. There is marvel and charm enough in that for me."

— **Margaret Fuller, American journalist, editor, critic, and women's rights advocate**

“We have a hunger of the mind which asks for knowledge of all around us, and the more we gain, the more is our desire; the more we see, the more we are capable of seeing.”

— **Maria Mitchell, American astronomer, librarian, naturalist, and educator**

“The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.... It was the experience of mystery, even if mixed with fear, that engendered religion. A knowledge of the existence of something we cannot penetrate, of the manifestations of the profoundest reason and the most radiant beauty—it is this knowledge and this emotion that constitute the truly religious attitude. In this sense, and in this alone, I am a deeply religious man.”

— **Albert Einstein, German-born theoretical physicist**

“The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery.”

— **Anais Nin, French-Cuban American writer**

“A mystic is anyone who has the gnawing suspicion that the apparent discord, brokenness, contradictions, and discontinuities that assault us every day might conceal a hidden unity.”

— **Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, Reform rabbi**

“Whenever you find tears in your eyes, especially unexpected tears, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not, God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next.”

— **Frederick Buechner, American writer and theologian**

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart, and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms, and like books in a very foreign tongue. ... Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then, gradually, without even noticing, live along some distant day into the answer.”

— **Rainer Maria Rilke, Bohemian-Austrian poet**

“Turn your wounds into wisdom.”

— **Oprah Winfrey, American media executive, actress, talk show host, and philanthropist**

“The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.”

— **Eleanor Roosevelt, American political figure, diplomat and activist**

“If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder, he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world we live in.”

— **Rachel Carson, American biologist and conservationist**

“It began in mystery, and it will end in mystery, but what a savage and beautiful country lies in between.”

— **Diane Ackerman, American writer and naturalist**

Whatever happens. Whatever

what is is what

I want. Only that. But that.

— **Galway Kinnell, “Prayer,” A New Selected Poems**