



Mystery

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Based on Soul Matters Small Group, The Gift of Mystery, December 2023

Compiled and adapted by Kris Seitz

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: We live in a culture that loves to conquer mysteries. For us modern folks, the unexplainable is simply a lock that has to be picked, a puzzle to be figured out. But what if mystery isn't just something to solve? What if it's also something to be listened to? This is the lesser recognized call of our faith. "Yes," it says, "Stay skeptical, continue to question and seek answers. But at the same time, leave space for life to speak!"
– Soul Matters, Welcome to the Gift of Mystery

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. How has mystery become more present (or been less noticeable) over your life?
2. If life can be lived as a problem to be solved, a game to be won, a struggle to be survived, or a mystery to be lived, have you approached it just one way? What determines how you approach it?
3. How has music (playing or listening) or artwork (doing or seeing) connected you to the mysteries and marvels of life?
4. Do you believe that your dreams reveal something about life's mysteries? Please share about this.
5. What has been your most successful means of encountering or staying open to mystery?

Readings - Quotes/Readings:

I have a friend who speaks of knowledge as an island in a sea of mystery. Let this then be the ground of my faith: All that we know, now and forever, all scientific knowledge that we have for this world, or ever will have, is as an island in the sea. Still the mystery surrounds us.

– Chet Raymo, American writer, physics professor, and naturalist, b.1936

Let me keep my distance, always, from those / who think they have the answers. / Let me keep company always with those who say / "Look!" and laugh in astonishment, / and bow their heads.

– Mary Oliver, American poet, b.1935

You bring yourself before the sacred,
before the holy,
before what is ultimate and bigger than your lone life...

You stand at the edge of mystery,
at the edge of the deep...

Meanwhile, the armful of worries you brought to the edge of mystery
have fluttered to your feet...

– Rev. Angela Herrera, American writer and UU minister

Readings continued

I believe God is everything ... My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it came to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed.

– Shug, in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, American writer and social activist, b.1944

Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life.

– Rachel Carson, American marine biologist, writer and conservationist, b.1907

In a true encounter with another human being, we come face to face with the mystery of life. In some way, every other person, no matter how well we know them, will remain as mysterious to us as a country across the ocean we only read about in books.... In every interaction, whether it is with a stranger or our longtime partner, we can be surprised by what we have not yet seen or even imagined.

– David Rynick, American writer, life coach and Zen teacher, b.1952

I believe that every one of us is a mystic because we have this experience of belonging once in a while, out of the blue...sometimes, without any particular reason, suddenly out in nature you feel one with everything. And every human being has this. But what we call the great mystics, they let this experience determine and shape every moment of their lives. They never forgot it. And we humans, the rest of us, tend to forget it. We just forget it. But if we keep it in mind, then we are really related to that great mystery. Then we can find joy in it.

– David Steindl-Rask, Austrian-American Benedictine monk, author, and lecturer, b. 1926.

<https://onbeing.org/programs/david-steindl-rast-how-to-be-grateful-in-every-moment/>

The final mystery is oneself.

– Oscar Wilde, Irish poet and playwright, b.1854

Sitting in Silence (Reflect on questions and readings before sharing starts)

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: Let mystery have its place in you...leave a little fallow corner in your heart ready for any seed the winds may bring, and reserve a nook of shadow for the passing bird; keep a place in your heart for the unexpected guests, an altar for an unknown God.

– Henri-Frederic Ariel, Swiss moral philosopher, poet and critic, b. 1821

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.*