



Mysticism

Greenville UU Fellowship Greenville, South Carolina

Covenant Group Session Plan

Written by Denise Frick, January 2023

Welcome, Chalice Lighting: Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a sacred space. We light the chalice to honor 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: Share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening reading: 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, Kushner is a long time student and articulator of the mysteries and messages of the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabala.

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. What has been your understanding of what a mystic is? Reflecting on the readings for this session, which readings resonate with you in relation to what a mystic is?
2. Do you see yourself as a mystic, now, or did you in the past? Tell us more about that.
3. If you substitute the “god” word with, “the universe”, “the divine”, “the holy”, “the absolute” does your perception of being a mystic change? How can an agnostic or atheist be a mystic?
4. Do you agree with Rabbi Kushner that there is a “hidden unity”? How does this play out in your own faith or religious practice?

Readings -see below

Silence – a time for reflection prior to sharing.

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:

In the bigger scheme of things the universe is not asking us to do something, the universe is asking us to be something. And that’s a whole different thing. ~ Lucille Clifton

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.

READINGS

“There is virtually no religious system that does not include a mystical tradition--the Kabala in Judaism, Sufism in Islam, Hindu yoga, Buddhist meditation, Gregorian chant, Quaker silence, shamanic journeying, native vision quests, and U.U. Transcendentalist philosophy. Mysticism takes many forms and expressions--nature mysticism, soul-mysticism, ethical-mysticism, God-mysticism, the mysticism of love and service, knowledge and understanding. Most mystics speak a common language of personal experience and union with the divine, the all, or the holy.” ~ Richard M. Fewkes, UU Minister.

“Many contemporary persons don’t understand what mysticism is. ... in truth, the authentic mystic is the most practical of persons, the most rigorous of realists. Indeed the traditional prayer of the mystic is “Lead me from the unreal to the real.” It’s just that the mystic recognizes and honors the fact that reality as we perceive it is always partial. As one who has been a scientist, I know that this consideration applies even to science, which is nearly as dependent upon myths and models as theology is. The truth is ever beyond what we think it to be.”

~Rev. Dr. William “Bill” Houff, UU Minister and author of *“The Mystical Power of We”*

“A mystic is one who seeks direct experience of ultimate reality. The mystic senses that the divine is always present, but also that in our “normal lives” we are only dimly aware of it. The mystic wants to come closer, to connect, and know the truth intimately.” ~Dan Harper, UU Minister.

Most important of all, do everything you can to nurture your spiritual intelligence. It is your only genuine source of hope, direction, meaning, and comfort. ~ Cynthia Bourgeault, Episcopal priest, author.

“Every one of us is a mystic. We may or may not realize it; we may or may not even like it. But whether we know it or not, whether we accept it or not, mystical experience is always there, inviting us on a journey of ultimate discovery. We have been given a life in this perplexing world to become who we ultimately are: creatures of boundless love, caring, compassion, and wisdom. Existence is a summons to the eternal journey of that sage- the sage we all are, if only we could see.” ~Wayne Teasdale, Author, *The Mystic Heart*.

Formal Definitions- Who are the mystics?

1. Persons who seek by various means to become one with God or the Absolute.
2. Persons characterized by dreamy confusion of thought, especially when based on mysterious agencies or occult thought.
3. Persons believing that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (as intuition or insight).

~ Rev. Steve Doughty, Furman OLLI Instructor, from course offered in Fall 2022, Gifts of the Mystics.

“ ... it is only the mystic who brings creativity to religion.” ~ Carl Jung, Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst.

“I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man's life. As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change. So I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience.” ~ Martin Buber, Austrian Jewish and Israeli philosopher.

“Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” ~Howard Thurman, American author, philosopher, theologian, mystic, educator, and civil rights leader.

“There is the music of Heaven in all things.” ~Hildegard of Bingen, also known as St. Hildegard, a German mystic.