



Silence

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Written by: Denise Frick. Revised by Kelsea Efird, February 2022.

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: Share something from your life since we last met and how you are feeling now.

Opening Words

We can be silent “with” people, as in the kind of silence that surrounds reflection, contemplation, and prayer. Silence of this sort – the kind we practice in a circle of trust – is yet another form of human communion. Compassionate silence can help us connect with each other, to touch and be touched by truths that evade all words. ~Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness, The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, 2004

Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. How does the balance between talking and silence play out in the conversations with those closest to you? What do you do to achieve the balance that you want or need?
2. Who in your life models silence and speaking in a way that you are inspired by or want to replicate?
3. How do you find silence in our cacophonous modern world? How do you make room for silence in your life?
4. If you have or had a silent meditation practice, describe your experience. How does it feel to sit in silence? If you tried one of the meditations included below, share your experience.
5. Share your reactions to periods of silence that occur during covenant circle meetings.

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

Readings – see below

Sharing: This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Please share one or more of your 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 or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.

Closing Reading

How quiet it is when we have the patience to be silent. How much we can learn in moments like these. We can learn to have patience with ourselves, to better understand and like who and what we are. We can learn to have patience with others, to better listen to what they say and how they feel. We can learn to have patience with life, to better work with it, rather than against it. How much do we need silence: Silence for truth so that we may learn wisdom, Silence for wisdom so that we may love, Silence for love so that we may be just, Silence for justice so that we may live fully. May we be more patient and more silent, so that we may proceed with courage and compassion. ~Rev. Charles A. Gaines, UU Minister

Announcements/Plans

Personal 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 meet again.

Readings

Soon silence will have passed into legend. Man has turned his back on Silence. Day after day he invents machines and devices that increase noise and distract humanity from the essence of life, contemplation, meditation.

~Jean Arp, 1887-1966, sculptor, painter, poet

Silence, or at least my attempts to experience it, is elusive and therefore attractive. It is the place beyond self-centeredness and anxiety. Silence is where I come back to myself. It is where I find, oddly enough, the connection that I can carry into the world and the courage to allow myself to live there.

~ Maureen Nery, Greenville, South Carolina UU Fellowship member, in sermon given at GUUF, 11/9/ 2014

The most boring thing in the world? Silence.

~Justin Timberlake, entertainer

I like silence; I'm a gregarious loner and without the solitude, I lose my gregariousness.

~Karen Armstrong, Author and commentator

I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't.

~Audre Lorde, 1934-1992, writer and civil rights activist

True silence is the rest of the mind; it is to the spirit what sleep is to the body, nourishment and refreshment.

~ William Penn, 1644-1718, founder of what would become Pennsylvania

Sometimes being a friend means mastering the art of timing. There is a time for silence. A time to let go and allow people to hurl themselves into their own destiny. And a time to prepare to pick up the pieces when it's all over.

~Octavia Butler, 1947-2006, Author

We sit silently and watch the world around us. This has taken a lifetime to learn. It seems only the old are able to sit next to one another and not say anything and still feel content. The young, brash and impatient, must always break the silence. It is a waste, for silence is pure. Silence is holy. It draws people together because only those who are comfortable with each other can sit without speaking. This is the great paradox.

~Nicholas Sparks, *The Notebook*

How much better is silence; the coffee cup, the table. How much better to sit by myself like the solitary sea-bird that opens its wings on the stake. Let me sit here forever with bare things, this coffee cup, this knife, this fork, things in themselves, myself being myself.

~Virginia Woolf, *The Waves*

Two thoughtful essays on Silence can be found on line, the links are below. You may want to read or listen to these before the covenant group session.

Imagine a nation that listened rather than blogged and posted. A nation that, in times of turmoil, gave itself permission to be still, to not speak, not act -- until all that was unspoken was given time and space to make its case, to be taken into account.

~ Dianne Aprile, This I Believe contributor

The Way of Silence, Dianne Aprile, <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/144206/>

I believe in a silence that allows me to stop paying attention to the world around me and start listening to my own heart. In the years since my father's death, I try daily to hear the silence amid the noise of career, children, war, recession and success. Most days I find it as I walk with my daughters in the woods behind our home. It's the church of my adult life. I tell my girls about the grandfather they never knew, and the lessons he gave me. I tell them how he saved my life. I tell them I believe there is a voice inside all of us that needs to be heard. (excerpt from *A Grace of Silence*)

~Andrew Flewellnig, This I Believe contributor

A Grace of Silence, Andrew Flewelling, <http://thisibelieve.org/essay/7365/>

If you would like to experience silent or guided and silent meditation please consider trying one of the following prior to the session.

A silent meditation with a start and stop bell only, no guidance, 5 minutes.

<https://youtu.be/xxHrqk-EoV0>

A guided meditation, 10 minutes. Daily Calm by Tamara Levitt.

<https://youtu.be/ZToicYcHI0U>

A meditation on Calm-Ease, 20 minutes guided by Tich Nhat Hanh.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHvtlcaD194&t=388s>