



## The Practice of Presence

Covenant Group Session Plan

Greenville Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Greenville, South Carolina

Based on material from Soul Matters-Small Group: Welcome to the Practice of Presence-

December 2024

Complied and adapted by Denise Frick and Marie McIntyre, November 2024

**Recommended Spiritual Practice:** The Practice of One Sentence Diaries – see last page of this handout. Come to circle ready to share your experience with this. (Optional, of course)

**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:

Spiritually, presence can mean two quite different things. On the one hand, contemplatives talk of “being present.” Presence from this perspective is all about awareness and remembering to “live in the moment.” On the other hand, theologians tend to come at presence from the perspective of a hidden and divine “otherness.” Their concern is not just that we pay attention to the present moment, but that we notice a transcendent Presence woven through all moments.

We don't have to choose between attentiveness or otherness. Often, they dance together more than they compete. Haven't we all felt that when we are fully present, the most powerful presences emerge?

~Soul Matters Welcome to the Practice of Presence Introduction, December 2024

### Questions to prompt and guide discussion:

1. What do you know now about being in the present moment that you didn't know when you were younger?
2. Do reminders about the brevity of our lives and calls to "live every day as if it were your last" help or get in the way of you being present to the preciousness of your days? Share your reaction to this.
3. Whose absence feels most present to you during the holiday season? If you could say something to them, what would it be?
4. What if winter is a time of being present to the need to withdraw from the world and enter into a time of healing hibernation? How might honoring this alter the way you approach the holiday season?
5. How do regularly practice remaining present to the injustice and suffering of others? How do you intentionally let it touch you, even as our culture tells you, in a thousand tricky ways, that it's ok to ignore it and shut it out?

### Readings- See below

**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)**

**Response – Hold Up and Hold Out** – “Hold up” or share with gratitude one thing that you heard in the sharing that especially struck you as you listened. “Hold out”, share how that connects to your life or clarified something about your own situation. Continue to practice deep listening.

### **Closing reading:**

The underlying message here is that the world is shot through with unnoticed gifts and grace. It's a message perfectly fit for this holiday month that so often celebrates presents over presence. In the face of commercials and billboards that tell us our lives will finally be complete if we stuff them with a few more shiny objects or plastic gadgets, our spiritual traditions come along and remind us that our lives are already whole, and home. Their message: The greatest gift of the holidays is noticing the many gifts that have been sitting there all along.  
~Soul Matters, Welcome to the Practice of Presence, December 2024

### **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**

Don't wait until you've reached your goal to be proud of yourself. Be proud of every step you take toward reaching that goal.

~Simone Biles

Drink your tea slowly and reverently, as if it is the axis on which the earth revolves – slowly, evenly, without rushing toward the future. Live the actual moment. Only this moment is life.

~Thich Nhat Hanh

You could ask what would be a good use of my life?, thinking the answer is going to be a career choice or something, but I would say the most important thing is using your life to train in being present—in being here with an open heart. Synchronizing your mind with your body—having them be in the same place at the same time with a brave, honest, but also gentle attitude towards yourself and towards what you see.

~Pema Chödrön

Most of us have spent our lives caught up in plans, expectations, ambitions for the future; in regrets, guilt or shame about the past. To come into the present is to stop the war.

~Jack Kornfield

Nothing in the past is as powerful as what we choose to do in the present moment.

~Louise Hay

Few skills are more essential than the ability to settle your body... When your body settles, it relaxes into its own experience in the present moment. It accepts whatever is happening, including any pain that you may need to acknowledge and metabolize.

~Resmaa Menakem

Beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. The least we can do is try to be there.

~Annie Dillard

# Soul Matters Spiritual Practice

## Option A

### *Be Present with the Day You Just Had (The Practice of One Sentence Diaries)*

Our days can easily drift by us, and sometimes steamroll us. Either way, we lose hold of them, and they lose hold of us. Holding on and being present to our days is what diary writing has long been about. But complex and extensive diary entries are a hard commitment to keep. That's why [one-sentence diaries](#) are so helpful. They enable us to be present with our days in a manageable and sustainable way.

So give this practice of one-sentence diaries a try, either by testing it out for a month or by using this month to begin a long-term commitment to the process. Learn a bit more about it [here](#). Get some tips about how to approach it [here](#) and [here](#). Wondering what exactly to write? [Here](#) and [here](#) are a bunch of great prompts. And what about the diary itself? Well, we recommend this simple and thoughtfully-designed ["five-year" one](#). You could also use an [online diary](#) or [make your own](#).

Come to your group ready to share not only how doing one sentence a day was meaningful, but also why you were drawn to it in the first place. Enjoy holding on to your days!