**Loneliness**

Greenville UU Fellowship, Greenville, SC

Covenant Group Session Plan

Written by Lia Schofield and Denise Frick, May 2018

**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 are here to abet creation and to witness to it,

To notice each other’s beautiful face and complex nature

so that creation need not play to an empty house.

~Annie Dillard, *Singing the Living Tradition*, reading #420

**Questions to prompt and guide discussion:**

1. What is the difference between being alone and lonely for you?
2. How do you keep from being lonely? What are some of your strategies for doing that? Is developing a connection within yourself important to this process?
3. What are the basic underlying needs beneath a feeling of loneliness? Being seen and heard is one answer, what is yours?
4. What are some of the risks involved in remaining in a state of feeling lonely?

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

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

**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:**

The source of the quenching water of life waits behind the dams of loneliness and isolation we build. What's unbearable has a gift. In the acceptance of our loneliness, we might find that which is within us, our unbreakable connection to life, and awareness of the need to share who we really are.

~Lia Schofield

**Announcements/Plans**

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

**Extinguish the Chalice**

**Readings**

The whole conviction of my life now rests upon the belief that loneliness, far from being a rare and curious phenomenon, peculiar to myself and to a few other solitary men, is the central and inevitable fact of human existence.

~Tom Wolfe

Loneliness is the poverty of self; solitude is the richness of self.

~May Sarton

Loneliness has an important role to play in life; it's a flashing sign that something needs to change.

~Gretchen Rubin

Be ye lamps unto yourselves, be your own confidence; hold to the truth within yourselves as to the only lamp.

~attributed to Gautama Buddha, *Singing the Living Tradition*, # 184

Our uniqueness makes us special, makes perception valuable - but it can also make us lonely. This loneliness is different from being 'alone': You can be lonely even surrounded by people. The feeling I'm talking about stems from the sense that we can never fully share the truth of who we are. I experienced this acutely at an early age.

~Amy Tan, American writer

Our equal and opposite needs for solitude and community constitute a great paradox. When it is torn apart, both of these life-giving states of being degenerate into deathly specters of themselves. Solitude split off from community is no longer a rich and fulfilling experience of inwardness; now it becomes loneliness, a terrible isolation. Community split off from solitude is no longer a nurturing network of relationships; now it becomes a crowd, an alienating buzz of too many people and too much noise.

~Parker J. Palmer

**Reference reading**

***How Loneliness Begets Loneliness: Social isolation kills, and in the process it makes it harder to reach out to others***. ***A psychologist explains how to break the cycle.*** By Olga Khazan. Interview of John Cacioppo, a psychologist at the University of Chicago who wrote a book on loneliness and has researched the phenomenon extensively.

 <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/04/how-loneliness-begets-loneliness/521841/>