

Soul Expansion, Made Personal

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Our Spirit Friends group has been meeting monthly for six years now. This is the name of our small group ministry. Some of the participants have changed through the years and some have stayed the same. We have purposely kept the group small, between six and nine. This allows enough airtime for each person to take the time to think out loud which makes for the most meaningful dialogue. Spirit Friends is the centerpiece of my participation in Unitarian Universalism and a very precious aspect of my own spiritual expansion.

The meetings cause me to think differently and feel deeply in a way that informs my sense of being a spirit-wrapped-in-flesh. These are times to step out of time for a couple of hours and wrestle with topics that take me on an inward journey to where my spirit meets my human personality. By being in dialogue with others who are providing an open discussion space, I can struggle to be articulate and specific in framing my beliefs and questions and ponderings. I can hear when I am merely reflecting what I may have absorbed from others and when I have reached into a deep place that is more purely my own.

The members of the group come with different backgrounds and current belief systems. Some have done a great deal of inner work and others have not done as much. This spectrum forces us to be thoughtful and exacting in the way we communicate, which inevitably enriches the discussions. The one commonality among us is the belief that we are more than just physical beings.

Topics are informally offered by various members of the group. Sometimes the topics arise from an individual member's life circumstance, such as a death in the family. Other times one of us may have come across a listing from a book's table of contents. We allow ourselves the freedom to move through a topic over more than one session or segue into one that was unplanned. Once in a while a topic springs up spontaneously from the check-in with which we begin each session. We take turns relating how our past month has gone, especially what has occurred that has connected us or reminded us of our sense of spirituality.

We ask respectful questions of one another and share our genuine puzzlement over statements a member may have made. This provides a kind and yet clear mirror and causes the speaker to explore ever deeper into her or his beliefs. Once in a while a member of the Spirit Friends group is surprised by what they themselves have said. These moments of self-revelation are treated with high regard and even a sense of celebration. It is a moment when the spirit seems to reveal itself from the depths of that person and it leaves the rest of us in awe.

The feeling I get from meetings is that people's souls expand more into their personalities. This interpenetration of the deep and beautiful aspect of each of us is such a comfort and such a joy. There is a sense of witnessing an awakening from a long slumber out of the detailed and consuming day-to-day world in which we all function. It is both soothing and enlivening.

I am grateful to be with people who have the courage to question themselves and the openness to absorb new thoughts and new beliefs. The dialogue we have once a month gives me solace and hope. I have compassionate witnesses to my life's journey and to my quest to be a worthy and awake human being. I have fellow Earth travelers who encourage my wish to go ever deeper into the places within myself that need illumination and that inform my humanness with a reminder of its divinity.

Each of my Spirit Friends would describe the sessions differently. They would tell you a variety of wonderful results they have gained by being in the group. That, I think, is the best portrayal of the richness and grace that a small group ministry can offer to one's life.