



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network
The Art of Imperfection: WABI-SABI Session Plan
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(TOPIC READINGS start on p. 4)

OUR SMALL GROUP MISSION

These Small Group conversations are offered as a way to get to know each other better, as we explore the various topics selected by our Small Group Team, related to our life experiences, questions, joys, and challenges. We are free to share our thoughts and feelings, joys and struggles, as we choose, and are here to listen to and care about each other. (We are NOT here to be a therapy group ~ or to tackle “church politics”!)

We look forward to building closer connections with each other, as we spend this time together, and form new or deeper friendships and build our sense of community.

OUR SMALL GROUP COVENANT

As members of this Small Group of the Universalist Church, we covenant with each other to help make this experience both personally and spiritually rewarding, to nourish our sense of community, and to learn and practice right relationship.

We will try to arrive before the beginning of each session so that it can start on time. We will try to attend all of the meetings of our group unless we are ill or away, and will let the group know in advance when that will occur or by contacting the facilitator:

Facilitator Contact information:

We use these guidelines for sharing, as a pathway to a caring community:

- We will deeply listen and ask honest and open questions.
- We will respect confidentiality. What is said here stays here, unless we agree to share something outside of our group.
- We will allow others to speak without interruption.
- We will not try to fix, save, advise or correct.
- We will honor time for reflection and quietness and respect a member’s right to remain silent, as they choose.
- We will treat others with respect and without judgment.
- We will honor the diversity of thought and feeling and values among us.

CHECK IN

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Connection is the energy created between people when they feel seen, heard, valued and understood. One of the goals of small group is to move out of our heads and into our hearts in order to deepen our connections with one other.

Authentic sharing from a place of honesty and vulnerability allows us to build a community of trust, caring, and belonging. The connections we build with one another become contagious. They grow and spread and infuse our larger church community with life and vitality.

1. WELCOME / INTRODUCTIONS :

Let's remember to **Silence cell phones! Speak up clearly, so all can hear.**

Remind folks to let us know and to remind us if they have a hearing issue or if we aren't speaking up enough, so we can be aware.

• At FIRST SESSION of the series: Let's introduce ourselves:

"Tell us a bit about yourself, for example:"

- Your name, where you live and how long you've been in this area
- How long have you been a UU, coming to our church
- Your family, what you do (or did) for work, any special passions or hobbies
(Model this by starting with yourself.)

Distribute MISSION/COVENANT/CHECK IN handout.

- **Read the MISSION statement orally - volunteers read COVENANT**
- **Remind folks to contact the facilitator if you are unable to come to a session** (if not included, give them your contact info. to add to their copy)
- **Read the CHECK-IN orally, in turn.**
- "Since time has been spent on introductions today (tonight), **we'll keep our check-in short**"; ex. "**Might you have a joy or feeling of gratitude you can share with us?**"

2. CHECK IN: (at 2nd and later sessions: repeat names again, if needed, and read the following aloud, as you choose):

Check-in is a time to deepen our connections with each other by sharing joys, sorrows, challenges, and changes in our lives. Sharing is not required. Only share if you are comfortable. What is shared in group is confidential.

Some **CHECK-IN PROMPTS:**

- *How have these past couple of weeks gone for you?*
- *Can you share some of your 'highs' and/or 'lows'?*
- *Has anything brought you a sense of gratitude or accomplishment? - of joy - or sorrow?*

3. OPENING: Use "chime" or bell to quiet folks; **LIGHT CANDLE:**

(3 reading choices below, you might vary this from session to session)

- *May "our separate fires kindle one flame" as we gather in this circle—bringing our stories, our reflections, our hopes and our struggles.
May our candle flame lend light and promise for our time together.*
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- *May we know once again that we are not isolated beings, but connected, in mystery and miracle, to the universe, to this community and to each other.*  
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- *May our time together bring learning, understanding, compassion, encouragement, and hope as we share about our life journeys and passions.*

4. CENTERING: *In preparation for our conversation, let's take a few moments to center ourselves and be thankful for this time we have together in community.*

Please get comfortable, place both feet solidly on the floor, rest your hands on your thighs and let your shoulders drop. Gently close your eyes or focus on a spot a few feet in front of you on the floor. Bring your attention to the flow of your breath.

*Breathing in I calm my body.
Breathing out I smile.*

*Dwelling in this present moment,
I know this is a wonderful moment.*

Our life's path is not one we travel alone. We are in it together, and the company of spiritual friends helps us feel our interconnectedness.

Ring the chime: *"Slowly open your eyes."*

5. DISTRIBUTE READING:

Ask for **volunteers to read the paragraphs aloud, in turn.** You might include a **pause after the reading**, to allow time to reflect before responding.

6. POSE QUESTIONS to prompt sharing, invite folks to respond if and as they choose; If you choose, you can **split readings into sections**, with questions/conversation as you go along (some readings are already done this way).

Encourage silent spaces between reflections; be comfortable with silence.

You might prompt: **"Take some time to think about that."** - or the like.

FEEL FREE TO ADJUST or ADAPT THE QUESTIONS PROVIDED

You may not get to all of them, or you may want to modify them slightly or skip around a bit, even make up a new question, depending on what comes up in the conversation, to keep it moving along.

KEEPING YOUR GROUP ON TRACK: If a group member should go on and on, or responds inappropriately so that **conversation needs redirection**, gently ask that they give others an opportunity to share or say something like:

- **"Let's reconsider the question"**
- **"Let's stop now and take a moment to reflect."**
- **"Thank you for sharing your thoughts. Now let's move on".**

You can also make reference to the covenant.

(If you are co-facilitating, work out a collaboration system with your partner, such as: when the other is facilitating, feel free to help guide the conversation, step in if you see a need to redirect.)

If the conversation has slowed down, you as facilitator can model responses to help the conversation along. **Some prompts could be:**

- **What are your thoughts about that?**
- **How does it make you feel?**
- **Can you say more about that?**
- **What does it make you think of?**

If the topic is really not going well, turn it back to the group:

- **"What do you want to do with this topic?"**

The Art of Imperfection: WABI-SABI

According to Japanese legend, a young man named Senno Rikyu sought to learn the elaborate set of customs known as the Way of Tea. He went to a tea-master, who tested the younger man by asking him to tend the garden. Rikyu cleaned up debris and raked the ground until it was perfect, then scrutinized the immaculate garden. Before presenting his work to the master, he shook a cherry tree, causing a few flowers to spill randomly onto the ground.

To this day, the Japanese revere Rikyu as one who understood to his very core a deep cultural thread known as wabi-sabi. Emerging in the 15th century as a reaction to the prevailing aesthetic of lavishness, ornamentation, and rich materials, *wabi-sabi* is the art of finding beauty in imperfection and profundity in earthiness, a way of living that peacefully accepts the natural cycle of growth and decay. It is a **world view** centered on the acceptance of **transience** and imperfection and of revering authenticity above all. The concept is now so deeply ingrained that it's difficult to explain to Westerners; no direct translation exists.

Broadly, *wabi-sabi* is everything that today's sleek, mass-produced, technology-saturated culture isn't. It's flea markets, not shopping malls; aged wood, not swank floor coverings; one single morning glory, not a dozen red roses. *Wabi-sabi* understands the tender, raw beauty of a gray December landscape and the aching elegance of an abandoned building or shed. It celebrates cracks and crevices and rot and all the other marks that time and weather and use leave behind. To discover wabi-sabi is to see the singular beauty in something that may first look decrepit and ugly. Nature's cycles of growth, decay, and erosion are embodied in frayed edges, rust, liver spots. Through wabi-sabi, we learn to embrace both the glory and the melancholy found in these marks of passing time.

Characteristics of the *wabi-sabi* aesthetic include asymmetry, roughness, simplicity, economy, austerity, modesty, intimacy, and appreciation of the integrity of natural objects and processes.

According to Leonard Koren in "*Wabi-Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers*", "*Wabi-Sabi* in its fullest expression can be a way of life. At the very least, it is a particular type of beauty . . . of things imperfect, impermanent and incomplete. It is a beauty of things humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional." He suggests it can be called "the Zen of things". He puts it this way: "All comes to nothing in the end. Everything wears down. The planets and the stars, even intangibles like reputation, family heritage, historical memory, scientific theorems, mathematical proofs, great art and literature - all eventually fade into oblivion and nonexistence. . . . In its acceptance of the inevitable, *wabi-sabi* forces us to contemplate our own impermanence, our mortality, stirs a bittersweet comfort since we know all existence shares the same fate."

Before we start our conversation, let's take a few moments to review and reflect on these readings about a concept which may seem a bit foreign to us.

QUESTIONS on next page:

QUESTIONS:

- What is your initial reaction to this way of thinking? Do you find it comforting or unsettling, or even disturbing?
- What things pop into your mind as you consider this concept - are there things in nature, any objects you cherish or have around you at home?
- What are some things that you might think about and value differently, using this *Wabi-Sabi* perspective?
- Is there a new activity (sport, craft, adventure, etc.) you might give yourself permission to try, knowing full well that your first and successive tries will be imperfect?
- How might this concept help you embrace your own imperfections?
- Think about a perceived imperfection of a friend or loved one. What could you learn by considering how this imperfection makes him or her the unique person that he or she is?

READING # 2:

NOTE: If there is not time to get to this next reading, ask folks to think about it at home and contemplate the questions that follow.

From “*Craftfulness: Mend Yourself by Making Things*”, by Rosemary Davidson:

The *wabi-sabi* aesthetic or way of life chimes with our craft ethos and the spirit of “craftfulness” in several important ways. . . redefining beauty as matter of perception: unassuming, modest, coarse objects, ugly things, if you like, become beautiful on deeper contemplation. Beauty, like happiness, and like creativity, is a state of mind. This is an incredibly comforting concept and guiding principle, when you think about it.

So too, is the idea that irregular or old, used and worn items that are rusty, eroded, patched, glued or repaired are all the more beautiful and precious *because* of their imperfections. The glitches, tears, loose threads, holes, cracks, smears or dents on an object, along with the marks of age and use, carry a memory of the hands of the people who made them; of those that have used, reused and repaired them; and of time’s ineluctable march.

“Craftfulness” is not just about making new things, new objects from scratch. Careful and mindful consumption, the spirit of “make do and mend”, recycling and finding use and beauty in things that others might reject, discard, overlook are important principles too.

Mending, darning, repairing and recycling are absolutely key to our way of thinking. As mass-market production has driven down the cost and value of everyday items, we have become used to discarding things that are no longer quite perfect and simply buying new disposable things. We rarely take the time to fix anything anymore - it’s so easy to buy new with just one click. Learning how to darn a jumper or re-sew a seam or a hem might sound painstaking laborious and irksome, but from experience, once mastered there is a reward of feeling intense satisfaction when a cherished wardrobe stalwart has been rescued by your own efforts.

QUESTIONS on next page:

QUESTIONS

- What are some things you have repaired and reused? How did you feel as you did this. Does this concept help you value that process more?
- Given this approach, can you think of something that you might decide to tackle repairing, rather than discarding?
- If you have hung on to too many things, how might it help you declutter and simplify? Might you choose differently when deciding what is worth keeping?
- What resources are out there, where we can take things so they can be useful to others, rather than just being discarded?

As CONVERSATION comes to an end, you might ask for last thoughts on the topic:

“Do you have a thought from this conversation that you will carry home with you?”

CLOSING:

Wabi-Sabi is being comfortable with the passing of time and the impermanence of things and people, as well as as acceptance of the "incomplete, imperfect and mismatched."

RING CHIME and EXTINGUISH CANDLE (Choose one of these or one of your choice)

As our time together comes to a close, we give thanks for one another, for the chance to share our lives, and to renew our spirits in the company of friends. May we go forth enriched by our gathering, committed to living life fully, to loving life with more passion, and to supporting one another.

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*Remembering that the universe is so much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth from this time together with the resolve to stop trying to reduce the incomprehensible to our own petty expectations, so that wonder -- that sense of what is sacred -- can find space to open up our minds and illumine our lives.*

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May we value our shared reflections and take away new understandings of ourselves, each other, and our being together. Thank you for sharing your story. Thank you for creating a place of safety. Thank you for listening with appreciation.

ANNOUNCE NEXT SESSION'S TOPIC: (unless last session)

Ask for a volunteer to bring in a CLOSING reading (if needed) for this next session (It can be something they particularly like, doesn't necessarily have to relate to the topic.)

if providing SNACKS, ask for a volunteer