

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Covenant Group Topic

Acceptance

Community Church of Chapel Hill Unitarian Universalist, Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson March 2009

Chalice Lighting: May the light of this chalice remind us to be here now, in the present moment - to know that this moment is enough just as it is, that we are enough, just as we are, and that the Eternal spirit sustains us no matter how often our own spirits may flicker or falter.

Brief Check-in: How is it with your spirit today/tonight?

Introduction to the topic and readings (you can go around the circle and have members of the group each read a paragraph)

(From an interview with Tara Brach, PhD, who was raised a Unitarian, and now identifies as a Buddhist, author of the book - "Radical Acceptance".)

"One of the reasons I was so drawn to writing about radical acceptance is because we spend so many moments at war, and we do it in the ways we judge ourselves, we do it in the ways we blame others, we do it in the ways we feel it's our country against that country. There is so much division in this world.

So what is really the path of healing? It can begin in this moment, by embracing the life that's here. Because if we can begin to bring a sense of peace and care to the life inside us, naturally the circles widen to include other people. It's the way of the heart—if we can be kind towards ourselves we'll be kind towards others.

The biggest fear we have is that somewhere, we are failing or are going to fail. You can almost say that our personalities are in a large part a way of compensating for fear. We want to show to the world what would be acceptable and loveable. In doing so, we in some way disconnect from the aliveness and authenticity of who we are.

When some people talk about accepting themselves they have this fear that they're condoning some bad behavior, or that if they accept themselves, that means they'll never improve. But the truth is, we're not saying, "It's OK that you did that bad thing." All we're accepting is the actuality of our experience in the moment: I'm accepting this shame is here, I'm accepting this fear is here, I'm accepting this anger, I'm accepting that there's craving, I'm accepting the truth just now, that I acted out of that craving and I ate too much. I'm accepting how bad I feel about that.

But in the moment of accepting, we're not condoning. We're just acknowledging the truth of what's here, with kindness. The reality is, if we can do that, it actually begins to free us so we can in the next moment, and be a lot wiser.

One of the great psychologists, Carl Rogers, put it this way, 'It wasn't until I accepted myself just as I was in this moment, that I was free to change.' So a pre-condition to true transformation, is to accept ourselves in the moment."

Exercise (the covenant group leader can lead this for just a minute or two)

"To make the discussion on acceptance feel more immediate it might help to start with a brief exercise.

Think about an experience you had recently with another human being that felt uncomfortable and that does not yet feel resolved. That filled you full of confusing energy perhaps. Maybe it

happened with someone you don't particularly like or relate to, or maybe it was a family member, or a stranger on the road, or in a store. Take a moment to bring that experience to mind.

Does everyone have one in mind? Now take a minute of silent meditation to sit with that experience. Focus on yourself now, not the other person. What were you feeling and thinking? Particularly ask your self, did I want to get out of there, or stay?"

(a minute)

Ok, open your eyes.

POEM (facilitator reads) – A poem by Rumi speaks to this experience of entertaining uncomfortability and ambiguity within ourselves.

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture.

Still treat each guest honorably,
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

Questions: Focus on one of these questions or you can share whatever in the readings spoke to your own experience.

1. How does non-acceptance cause you suffering?
2. What do I really think about this idea of “entertaining” everything that comes my way, or into my heart as if it were a guest?

Remind of guidelines for sharing – One person speaks at a time without the rest of us interrupting. There is no cross talk (ie. trying to fix, correct, judge or re-educate someone else). Try to listen to each other as if you were listening to, or watching your own thoughts. Let others' words fall down into your heart. When it is your turn to speak it is not necessary to respond to the persons who have gone before you. Find out what your own inner wisdom wants to say. Together we create a quilt of wisdom, the design is a surprise.

Faciliatator can repeat the questions...

At the end of the session the facilitator asks members to share their “likes and wishes” (again using the same guidelines, no cross talk etc)

What did you like about this session, what are your wishes for future sessions?

Closing words – “Let nothing disturb thee,
Nothing affright thee;
All things are passing;
God never changeth”

Saint Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), Spanish poet and nun