

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
SMALL GROUP SESSION  
AUTHENTICITY AND SINCERITY  
Rev. Glenn Turner, First UU Church, Auburn, Maine (August 2009)

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING:

“Coexist. The motto is plastered to your shirt in bold unavoidable letters. To the back of your hybrid car that slices global warming to a fraction. To the big purple pin you stabbed into your backpack. The one created from salvaging recycled coke bottles. The word is embodied in your every action. Every smile that brushes your lips. Every thoughtful wave to a stranger. You might as well tattoo it to your forehead.

“Every sentence that leaves your tongue drips with the tolerance that brands you a saint. With every protest you support and every canned good you donate, you broadcast your passion. You live to coexist.

“And every time you are faced with an intolerant (a homophobe, a xenophobe, a bigot, a chauvinist, a monomaniac) let your glare bore down on them and their primitive, uncultured minds. Make sure the contempt and abhorrence that contorts your face is enough to make them forget every ignorant belief crawling through their skulls.

“You should not, could not, and will not tolerate them. Then turn on you heels and march away, satisfied with your triumph. And as righteousness pulses through your chest, think about how they need to learn to tolerate. To coexist.”

- written by the 14 year old granddaughter of a friend -

CHECK IN: (40 - 50 minutes)

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for loved ones, issues you are facing.

Each person in the group speaks uninterrupted, if time remaining, general response and conversation is welcome. Confidentiality.

FOCUS: “Authenticity and Sincerity”

In 2006, Orlando Patterson wrote an essay in the New York Times entitled: “Our Overrated Inner Self.” He described “authenticity” as finding and expressing our true inner selves and judging all our relationships in terms of it. The result, he argued, is that emotional arguments trump reasoned discourse.

Patterson wrote: “I couldn't care less whether my neighbors and co-workers are authentically sexist, racist or ageist. What matters is that they behave with civility and tolerance, obey the rules of social interaction and are sincere about it. The criteria of sincerity are unambiguous: Will they keep their promises? Will they honor the meanings and understandings we tacitly negotiate? Are their gestures of cordiality offered in conscious good faith?”

What Patterson is saying is that we have a “public face.” We have civil roles to play. “And what it means for us today is that the best way of living in our diverse and contentiously free society is neither to obsess about the hidden depth of our prejudices nor to deny them, but to behave as if we had none.”

Discussion:

How is it for you? Do you get along better in the world being true to your inner self with all its emotive power, or true to your sense of civility or in making a sincere effort at knowing and getting along with others?

#### LIKES AND WISHES

How did this session go for you? Is there anything you'd like to call particular attention to?

#### CLOSING WORDS:

“There is no need to sally forth, for it remains true that those things which make us human are, curiously enough, always close at hand. Resolve then, that on this very ground, with small flags waving and tinny blasts on tiny trumpets, we shall meet the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us.” - from “Pogo Looks at the Abominable Snowman” - Walt Kelly