

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Small Group Ministry Session Plan
Black Cards and White Lies
Sanctuary Boston, MA

Gathering and Food

Chalice Lighting

Most truths are so naked that people feel sorry for them and cover them up, at least a little bit.

Edward R. Murrow

Today I bent the truth to be kind, and have no regret, for I am far surer of what is kind than I am of what is true.

Robert Brault

Check-in (2–3 minutes each @ 20 minutes)

Topic Introduction (Suggest 2 readers, alternate)

I had a friend who used to talk about “black cards.” He described it as a little file folder of his honest feelings about people. I was in my twenties, and I said, “Do you have a black card on me?” He said, “Of course.” I said, “What’s on it?” He said, “Well if I told you, you wouldn’t be my friend anymore.” What I mean is, Is it your duty as a writer who is writing about his life to put your black cards on the page? Is it your duty as a loving husband to share your black cards with your wife? Or are black cards just things you keep to yourself? And why do people enjoy black cards so much?

When he first read *Love and Lies*, Adam Thirlwell told me, “Write down all of your lies for a week.” I like this black card idea. Two things: I think writing always involves putting black cards on the page—especially, your black cards on yourself. Those are the really scary ones, aren’t they?

Well, no. It depends. Once you’ve put it down in one place, it’s not scary any more. It’s only the first time. Then it’s just out there.

I guess there will always be more black cards, and for me writing is in part about exorcism, self-exorcism. But the second thing I wanted to say is that your friend’s black cards probably changed all the time. And that’s what we have to remember about these “truths” and “deceptions”: our feelings, our subjective lives, are so complex and elusive. People who think they have a simple and stable set of views— truths! —about other people or themselves simply aren’t thinking at all. And dogmatism— especially when it comes to the people you love— is the very worst kind.

Amie Barrodale and Clancy Martin, in conversation

Discussion Questions

- 1) Do you believe that some truths are absolute and others are relative?
- 2) Can you hold opposing versions of truths simultaneously?
- 3) What role do you think religion plays in presenting, or unfolding, the truth?
- 4) Have you ever wounded with honesty? Dishonesty? Healed with either? Been hurt or healed?
- 5) How do you decide how to share difficult, honest things with people in your life?

First reflections (individual) and deep listening

Cross-talk and responses

Closing Words

The beginning of wisdom is found in doubting; by doubting we come to the question, and by seeking we may come upon the truth.

Pierre Abelard