

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
 Session Plan
Centering as A Spiritual Practice
 Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church, Hayward, CA, Kathryn LaMar, 2/2022

CHALICE LIGHTING **1 min**

For the person with attention, every day becomes the very day upon which all the world depends.

Rabbi Rami M Shapiro

COMMUNITY SINGING: FILLED WITH LOVING KINDNESS **3 min**

(No. 1031 in Teal Hymnal)

OPENING WORDS: **1 min**

Now and again, it is necessary to seclude yourself among deep mountains and hidden valleys to restore your link to the source of life. Breathe in and let yourself soar to the ends of the universe; breathe out and bring the cosmos back inside. Next, breathe up all fecundity and vibrancy of the earth. Finally, blend the breath of heaven and the breath of earth with your own, becoming the Breath of Life itself.

Morihei Ueshiba

SILENT MEDITATION / CENTERING **2 min**

The first sound of the gong brings us to silence. Please take time to center yourself, and temporarily push aside whatever might be preventing you from participating fully in this session. The second sound of the gong returns us to each other's presence.

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS) **40 min**

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met.

SONG: BREATHING (Joe Reilly) **7 min**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggMMLZZDFKc>

INTRODUCTION: **10 min**

Adapted from the websites “Mystic Elements,” “Mojan.com,” and “Contemplative Outreach.org”: When we have unique gifts, tuning out the psychic noise around us, day in, day out, can be overwhelming. Whether you do yoga, meditate, make stone grids, or practice some form of earth-based spirituality, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual grounding and centering are very basic core practices in most systems of spiritual practice or personal development, and make an incredible foundation for personal mastery.

There are numerous ways to find your center. Make sure you find a quiet space. Taking a few clearing breaths, allow yourself to drift softly into the idea you hold of yourself. Imagine you are on a journey to your core. Seek out a memory or feeling that seems to be the most sacred to you. Explore that feeling. Often what lies at the base of that memory, will help you define your center as it is in this moment. Note that, as we grow on our spiritual path, our center space may also change

Centering is a way to self awareness and owning yourself and your energy. You place your attention at your spiritual and personal center, call in your energies, and release any energy and programs that

is not yours. To center yourself, bring your attention into the center of your head (you may visualize a sphere in the center of your head), or the hara (a spiritual energy center about an inch below the belly button), or the heart. Choose the place where you feel you are balanced and contained, wherever you are firm in your awareness of self.

In the Christian tradition, a centering prayer is a simple way of praying--a listening prayer in which all thoughts and intentions other than openness to God are set aside. The instructions are quite similar to those from the Buddhist tradition:

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

QUOTES TO PONDER

10 min

Centering is a verb. It is an ongoing process ... Centering is not a model, but a way of balancing, a spiritual resource in times of conflict, an imagination. It seems in certain lights to be an alchemical vessel, a retort, which bears an integration of purposes, an integration of levels of consciousness. It can be called to, like a divine ear.

M.C. Richards

We have three centers: the emotional center, the intellectual center, and the physical body center. Each one of them has its own intelligence. How much better would we be if all three were working in unison?

Erin Gray

At the center of your being you have the answer; you know who you are and you know what you want.

Lao Tzu

I want you to be everything that's you, deep at the center of your being.

Confucius

There is no greater power in Heaven or on Earth than pure, unconditional love. The nature of the God force, the unseen intelligence in all things, which causes the material world and is the center of both the spiritual and physical plane, is best described as pure, unconditional love.

Wayne Dyer

Nature is an infinite sphere of which the center is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.

Blaise Pascal

The center that I cannot find is known to my unconscious mind.

W. H. Auden

Centering Prayer is an opening, a response, a putting aside of all the debris that stands in the way of our being totally present to the present Lord, so that He can be present to us. It is a laying aside of thoughts, so that the heart can attend immediately to Him. All prayer is a response. The Lord first knocks, beckons, calls to us.

Basil Pennington

One of the values of centering prayer is that you are not thinking about God during the time of centering prayer so you are giving God a chance to manifest. In centering prayer there are moments of peace that give the psyche a chance to realize that God may not be so bad after all. God has a chance to be himself for a change.

Thomas Keating

Mindfulness helps you go home to the present. And every time you go there and recognize a condition of happiness that you have, happiness comes.

Thich Nhat Hanh

When you look at the sun during your walking meditation, the mindfulness of the body helps you to see that the sun is in you; without the sun there is no life at all and suddenly you get in touch with the sun in a different way.

Thich Nhat Hanh

If every day you practice walking and sitting meditation and generate the energy of mindfulness and concentration and peace, you are a cell in the body of the new Buddha. This is not a dream but is possible today and tomorrow.

Thich Nhat Hanh

I have great respect for the past. If you don't know where you've come from, you don't know where you're going. I have respect for the past, but I'm a person of the moment. I'm here, and I do my best to be completely centered at the place I'm at, then I go forward to the next place.

Maya Angelou

Rajneeshism is creating a Noah's Ark of consciousness, remaining centered exactly in the middle of the cyclone. You can only escape within, and that's what I teach. I do not teach worship of God or any other ritual but only a scientific way of coming to your innermost core.

Rajneesh

In Asian languages, the word for "mind" and the word for "heart" are the same. So if you're not hearing mindfulness in some deep way as heartfulness, you're not really understanding it. Compassion and kindness towards oneself are intrinsically woven into it. You could think of mindfulness as wise and affectionate attention.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness is often spoken of as the heart of Buddhist meditation. It's not about Buddhism, but about paying attention. That's what all meditation is, no matter what tradition or particular technique is used.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

To drop into being means to recognize your interconnectedness with all life, and with being itself. Your very nature is being part of larger and larger spheres of wholeness.

Jon Kabat-Zinn

So what happens when your universe begins to get off balance, and you don't have any experience with bringing it back to center? All you can do is fight a losing battle, waiting for those walls to collapse, and your life to become one huge mystery ashtray. *Neal Shusterman*

Only the frantic of fear can harm you. Your calm and centered self knows exactly what to do. *Bryant McGill*

And I say the sacred hoop of my people was one of the many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. *Black Elk*

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION **1 min**

BREAK **10 min**

CONCOMITANT WITH SONG SERENITY by Godsmack (written by Sully Ema, Tony Rom-bola)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OLUNB993Dw&app=desktop>

GROUP REFLECTION / FEEDBACK **40 min**

Two rounds. Take a moment of silence and consider your response to one or more of these questions:

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON CENTERING, GROUNDING, AND MINDFULNESS

- ☉ Tell us about how you practice mindfulness in your daily life.
- ☉ How do you help your mind turn off the background noise and focus on the present?
- ☉ What spiritual practices do you use to help you ground, center, or be mindful.
- ☉ Which of your spiritual practices require centering and/or grounding as a first step?
- ☉ Unitarian Universalism's Fourth Principle affirms the value of a "free and responsible search for truth and meaning." Do you see meditation and other types of mindfulness as a means to finding "truth and meaning?"
- ☉ Do you regularly center yourself before embarking on any other activities during your day? Why? What advantages does this practice have for you?

FUTURE PLANS

I (Kathryn) will be out of town for our second-Wednesday lunch. Does someone want to arrange this in my absence?

Suggestions for topics to be reflected upon at our fourth-Wednesday meetings?

SESSION FEEDBACK

What changes would you have made to the session to make it more meaningful for you? Is it time to revisit our covenant?

COMMUNITY SINGING: BRIGHT MORNING STARS

3 min

(No. 357 in Grey Hymnal)

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS

1 min

Pause, breathe, and lift, undefined, what is possible. Let the feeling of celebration come upon you, even if you do not comprehend cerebral reasons to justify it. For from that center, it will generate its own, able to carry you, until the original ones manifest, from that very portal you chose to fashion, unrestricted.

Tom Althouse