



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Developmental Spirituality

Hayward, CA, Wednesday Evening Small Group, Kathryn LaMar, 7 November 2018

CHALICE LIGHTING

1 min

The first step in the evolution of ethics is a sense of solidarity with other human beings.

Albert Schweitzer

OPENING WORDS

1 min

Every religion needs a story, and Darwin's idea has given us a place in a new story with multiple layers of meaning. That story, the great epic of cosmic and biological evolution, is a religious story because it calls us out of our little self-centered worlds to see ourselves as part of a great living system. It gives a larger meaning and a broader ethic to our lives.

William R. Murry

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 tonight's 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. If you feel comfortable about it, mention something that may have changed your spiritual practices or how you view your own spirituality.

INTRODUCTION TO DEVELOPMENTAL SPIRITUALITY

5 min

The following material was excerpted and heavily edited from an essay by George Vaillant entitled *The Evolution of Spirituality*, published September 20, 2006, in **Essay**.

From a study of twins, psychiatrist Kenneth Kendler observed that high levels of personal devotion were strongly and positively correlated with increasing age. However, the older the adults became, the weaker their religious conservatism became and the greater their spiritual inclusiveness became.

The capacity of our brains to care for people outside of our kinship pattern develops throughout our lives. With maturity comes an increasing ability to differentiate our negative emotions--for example, to tell the difference between when our tears stem from anger and we should push people away, and when our tears come from grief and we should hold people tight.

Jean Piaget, the great Swiss child psychologist, noted that children's morality matured from primitive selfish belief through rule-bound piety into adult altruism. He illustrated this evolution from the three-year-olds' self-centered amorality using children's rules for playing marbles. Between ages 6 and 10, rules for marbles become engraved in metaphorical stone. Piaget called this de-

velopmental stage of thinking "concrete operations": There is only one way to play marbles, and all other ways are wrong.

In adolescence comes what Piaget termed "formal operations." Adolescents discover that there are many ways to play marbles. Motivation and cause became important. Such moral maturation takes place as a result of nonverbal schoolyard and biological development, not from "Sunday School" instruction.

By the time children are in their teens they can place general principles over concrete thinking. This may mean understanding that God, Allah, Yahweh, and Higher Power all mean the same thing. As each individual's morality matures, formal operations permit us to shift from the specific to the abstract. Formal operations allow us to class both members of Hamas and the Boston Tea Party as freedom fighters and as terrorists.

Jane Loevinger carried Piaget's ideas further into adult development. In her model, belief evolves into trust, and piety into tolerance, in three stages: the *Conformist*, the *Conscientious*, and the *Autonomous*. In her *Conformist* stage, behavior is evaluated in terms of concrete externals rather than in terms of emotions. Most laws and most religious dogma work at this level, as do the minds of a lot of adolescents and devout patriots in all nations.

As individuals mature, they reach Loevinger's *Conscientious* stage, in which love means you put your mate's needs above your own, you can have children when you are able to care for them properly, you value ecumenical religious services, and you sometimes support the United Nations over your own country's interests.

Loevinger believed that some, but not most, adults evolve further into what she calls the *Autonomous* stage, which means trusting others to be autonomous. Rather than giving the hungry a fish, you teach them how to catch fish. This autonomous stage involves a profound and empathic level of moral reasoning in which prose and passion, obedience and desire, are seamlessly integrated.

Thus, in late adulthood, cognitive development continues into "post-formal operations." Such post-formal operations involve the appreciation of irony and paradox: Learning to trust a universe in which the uncertainty principle is a basic axiom of quantum physics, in which good and evil exist side by side, in which innocent children die from bubonic plague, and in which to keep it you have to give it away.

It took the Catholic Church two millennia of cultural evolution and John Paul II 80 years of personal maturation, for a Vatican Pope to refer to Jews and Muslims as "brothers."

With maturation, then, our communal image of God becomes increasingly intangible, universal, and beyond ready comprehension. Over time, dependence on the negative emotions of fear and anger gives way to the positive emotions of faith, hope, love, joy, forgiveness, and compassion.

READING ROUND-THE-CIRCLE

3 min

Mature spirituality is not based on seeking perfection, on achieving some imaginary sense of purity. ☉ It is based simply on the capacity to let go and to love, to open the heart to all that is. ☉ The heart can turn the suffering and imperfections we encounter into the path of compassion. ☉ In this practice, the divine can shine through even in acts of ignorance and fear, inviting us to wonder at the mystery of all that is. ☉ In this there is no judgment and no blame, for we seek not to perfect the world but to perfect our love for what is on this earth.

☉ Thomas Merton saw it this way.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths where neither sin nor desire can reach, the person that each one is in God's eyes. ☉ If only they could see themselves as they really are. ☉ If only we could see each other that way there would be no reason for war, for hatred, for cruelty. ☉ I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other.

Jack Kornfield

SONG: **Magic Penny (Malvina Reynolds)** **4 min**

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

QUOTES TO PONDER **5 min**

It's been proven by quite a few studies that plants are good for our psychological development. If you green an area, the rate of crime goes down. Torture victims begin to recover when they spend time outside in a garden with flowers. So we need them, in some deep psychological sense, which I don't suppose anybody really understands yet.

Jane Goodall

The development of language is part of the development of the personality, for words are the natural means of expressing thoughts and establishing understanding between people.

Maria Montessori

Animals have genes for altruism, and those genes have been selected in the evolution of many creatures because of the advantage they confer for the continuing survival of the species.

Lewis Thomas

Constant development is the law of life, and a man who always tries to maintain his dogmas in order to appear consistent drives himself into a false position.

Mahatma Gandhi

Over the years, I think I've matured in my spiritual evolution and development to understand a bit more than the narrow religious thinking--to move beyond that through a sort of perfection of the grandiose nature of the universe, and how perfect it is in its sense and how satisfied we should all be in our place in that.

Buzz Aldrin

There's a theory that says that life is based on a competition and the struggle and the fight for survival, ... when you look at the fractal character of evolution, it's totally different. It's based on cooperation among the elements in the geometry and not competition.

Bruce Lipton

It's actually the minority of religious people who rejects science or feel threatened by it or want to sort of undo or restrict ... where science can go. The rest, you know, are just fine with science. And it has been that way ever since the beginning.

Neil deGrasse Tyson

Evolution is all about passing on the genome to the next generation, adapting and surviving through generation after generation. From an evolutionary point of view, you and I are like the booster rockets designed to send the genetic payload into the next level of orbit and then drop off into the sea.

Harvey V. Fineberg

The more important a call to action is to our soul's evolution, the more Resistance we will feel about answering it. But to yield to Resistance deforms our spirit. It stunts us and makes us less than we are and were born to be.

Steven Pressfield

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION **1 min**

BREAK **10 min**

GROUP REFLECTION (2 Rounds)**45 min****IDEAS FOR GROUP REFLECTION**

- Did any of the thoughts expressed in the introduction or quotes especially resonate with you?
- How has your personal sense of spirituality evolved over your lifetime?
- What part might religion play in biological or societal evolution?
- What is needed to encourage the evolution of society?
- What beliefs do you have that could be considered from the "amoral," "concrete thinking," or "formal operations" stages of your own development?
- Have you or the people in your closest circles reached the "post-formal operations" stages of development?
- What problems might be created in a society when the leaders are stuck in an earlier stage of development than others? How can such problems be prevented or addressed?

FUTURE TOPICS / SERVICE PROJECT**3 min****CLOSING SONG Step Into the Holy Circle (Charlie King)****4 min**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kd7g21PfeCs>

SESSION FEEDBACK**5 min****CLOSING WORDS / EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE****1 min**

Unless one believes in a superhuman reason which directs evolution, one is bound to believe in a reason inherent in humanity, a motive power transcending that of each separate people, just as the power of the organism transcends that of the organ. This reason increases in proportion as the unity of mankind becomes established.

Ellen Key