

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Enlightenment in Winter

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

*Based on a session from Eno River UU Fellowship, Durham, North Carolina*

**Opening Words & Chalice Lighting**

In winter, we contemplate the most basic of our needs and wants—warmth and light. Hearth fires and candles are flames of hope, marking the triumph of light and optimism. Evergreens, symbols of life eternal, are reminders of spring warmth and rebirth. Messages and gifts are reassurances of love. We reaffirm the hope and faith that light and sunshine will return, and the power of generosity will be victorious.

**Check-in:** *Take one or two minutes to share about your life.*

**Topic Introduction**

Enlightenment is a sense of clarity that illuminates what we are doing and why.

- *David S. Blanchard, adapted*

Awareness is a process of deepening self-acceptance. It is neither a cold surgical examination of life nor a means of becoming perfect. Whatever it observes, it embraces. There is nothing unworthy of acceptance...[But] Mindfulness is not only introspective. Once inner calm and clarity are present, expand your attention to the world around you: the medley of sounds that continuously assail the ears; the play of light, shade and color discernable even through closed eyelids; the wafting of smells into the nostrils; the lingering of tastes on the palate.

~ *Stephen Batchelor, Buddhism Without Beliefs (1997)*

If I could define enlightenment briefly, I would say it is the quiet acceptance of what is.

~ *Wayne Dyer*

**Focus Questions:**

1. Do you seek warmth and light spiritually as well as physically at this time of year? Is being with others more necessary?
2. When the distractions of leaves on the trees, grass growing, and flowers blooming are removed, the starkness of winter offers a certain clarity. Do you find it is a time for reflection and reassessing your life? (Resolutions?)
3. Are you able to grasp the promise of spring, buried deep in the cold ground, or is it too far removed right now?

**Check-out/Likes & Wishes:** *Did this session help to illuminate your January?*

**Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:**

In [winter], we cannot see sunflowers in France, so we might say the sunflowers do not exist. But the local farmers have already planted thousands of seeds, and when they look at the bare hills, they may be able to see the sunflowers already. The sunflowers are there. They lack only the conditions of sun, heat, rain and July. Just because we cannot see them does not mean that they do not exist. – *Thich Nhat Hanh*

The early mist had vanished and the fields lay like a silver shield under the sun. It was one of the days when the glitter of winter shines through a pale haze of spring.

~ *From Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton*